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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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PHOTO: PTI

Kejriwal skips 5th ED summons amid arrest fears

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will not appear before Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday for questioning in an alleged money laundering case linked to excise policy. ED on Wednesday had issued a fresh and the fifth summons to Kejriwal after he skipped four earlier summonses over the last four months. Terming the summons "illegal", the party said ED is repeatedly sending notices to Kejriwal to arrest him. AAP also alleged that BJP wants to topple its government in Delhi by getting Kejriwal arrested. The AAP will not let this happen, it said. Kejriwal skipped ED summonses for 2 November and 21 December in 2023 and 3 January and 18 January this year. He had called these notices "illegal". *—PTI*

Minor abducted, gang-raped, thrown from height in MP

GWALIOR, 2 FEB

A 15-year-old girl was allegedly abducted and raped by two youths who also threw her down from a height after she raised an alarm in Gwalior, officials said on Friday. The incident took place in Dabra town of the district on 29 January when the girl was on her way to a coaching class. Two youths allegedly abducted her on their motorcycle raped her and threw her down from height after she raised an alarm.Meanwhile, Congress leader and former Chief Minister Kamal Nath said the incident of abduction and gang rape of a Class 10 student in Gwalior has shamed the state. *—PTI*

Disbelief over Poonam Pandey's death due to cancer

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Actor Poonam Pandey reportedly died of cervical cancer at the age of 32. She made headlines in 2011 with her declaration that she would strip if India won the cricket World Cup. Her publicist announced the death on Friday but didn't have details of exactly where and when. News of Pandey's death came a day after Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the government's plans to focus on vaccination against cervical cancer for girls aged 9 to 14 as part of her interim Budget 2024. Till the end of a day there was no confirmation on the death of the model. No one in her family was aware about the cancer. As messages poured in, some shocked and others sceptical, #Poonam Pandey trended on X and Instagram. Was it indeed true? How could a woman die so young? Was the news fake? Wasn't she seen on the red carpet of an event just three days ago? The questions swirled with both Pandey and cervical cancer the centre of furious discussion across social media platforms. Instagram followers said the news could well be fake because she was seen three days ago in Goa. *—PTI*

Canada intelligence accuses India of election interference

Canada names India alongside China as 'most significant' threats

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Canada's national security agency identified India as potentially having interfered in the country's elections, according to an intelligence report.

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service named India in an intelligence report alongside China, which was identified as "by far the most significant threat".

The briefing report was obtained by Global News. The declassified document dated 24 February, 2023 was titled "Briefing to the Minister of Democratic Institutions on Foreign Interference".

The report said the problem of India's interference would worsen and said the government "must do more to protect Canada's robust democratic institutions and processes".

This comes amid India and Canada's worsening ties after Trudeau accused New Delhi of plotting Nijjar's murder *PHOTO: PTI*

Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau ordered the inquiry into allegations of foreign interference in the country's 2019 and 2021 elections.

It is the first time India has been accused of election interference in Canada, joining China and Russia that were already suspected of meddling in Canadian politics.

It came amid India and Canada's worsening ties after Trudeau went public with allegations that New Delhi was involved in the assassination of a Sikh national on Canadian soil. Masked attackers shot Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Canadian labelled a terrorist by India due to his advocacy for an autonomous Sikh state known as Khalistan.

The document obtained by the Canadian broadcaster had three pages for India but were redacted except for a single sentence: "India engages in FI (foreign interference) activities."

India and China were the only two countries identified by their name in the report.

On China's role, the report said: "We know that the PRC (People's Republic of China) sought to clandestinely and deceptively influence the 2019 and 2021 federal elections."

It said China's activities "are broad in scope and significant in the level of expended resources" and said its activities are "pervasive, and directed against all levels of government and civil society across the country". China has previously denied the allegation and urged Ottawa to "stop hyping up China-related lies and false information".

—Courtesy, The Independentc

PROTEST OVER C'GARH POLLS

AAP claims its leaders are under house arrest

Police personnel stop AAP supporters during a protest, in New Delhi on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

AAP alleged that its workers, leaders, including MLAs and councillors, were put under house arrest or detained to stop them from participating in a protest against BJP

AAP and the BJP staged counter-protests within a few hundred metres of each other as Delhi Police deployed a large number of personnel and multiple layers of barricading to keep order, turning central Delhi into a fortress that caused traffic jams at several places.

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had planned its demonstration in front of the BJP headquarters here against the alleged "cheating" in the Chandigarh mayoral elections, while the BJP's protest was before the AAP office over alleged "corruption" in the Arvind Kejriwal government.

But workers and leaders of the two parties could not reach their planned protest sites -- their offices are barely 800m apart -- owing to a wall of barricades and police personnel deployed on the Deen Dayal Upadhaya Marg.

Not just in central Delhi, police said "elaborate arrangements" were made on the national capital's borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to maintain law and order.

A total of 48 BJP and 15 Aam Aadmi Party workers were detained as they tried to breach barricades, police said, adding that no Delhi cabinet minister and MLA were detained.

Referring to the BJP, he said, the world's biggest party was caught on camera "stealing" votes in the Chandigarh mayoral polls. The elections to the posts of mayor, senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor were held on Tuesday and the BJP won all defeating the Congress-AAP alliance

BJP leaders and workers, who gathered in large numbers in front of their party's office waving flags and holding placards and posters criticising Kejriwal, attacked his government, alleging it is corrupt. They demanded Kejriwal's resignation.

"The Kejriwal government has become synonymous with corruption. Every day a scam of the government is exposed before the people," Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said.

The security measures and route diversions in view of the protests led to heavy traffic congestion in central Delhi and other parts of the city, leaving commuters stranded in long jams.

—PTI

A priest offers prayers at 'Vyas Ji Ki Tehkhana' after court allows Hindus to worship inside Gyanvapi mosque *PHOTO: ANI*

HC does not grant relief to Muslims on Gyanvapi

PRAYAGRAJ, 2 FEB

The Allahabad High Court did not give any immediate relief to the Gyanvapi Masjid committee which had challenged the order of the Varanasi court allowing Hindu prayers in a cellar of the mosque.

This means that Puja in the southern cellar of the complex will continue for now. The High Court has fixed 6 February as the next date for hearing in the matter.

Justice Rohit Ranjan Agrawal passed the order while hearing an appeal filed by the committee, which looks after the affairs of the mosque.

Appearing on behalf of the committee, advocate S F A Naqvi submitted before the court that the order was passed in a "very hurried manner" and on the day of retirement of the judge concerned. Advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain, representing the Hindu side, pointed out that the district court by means of order dated 17 January had appointed District Magistrate, Varanasi receiver of the property in pursuance of which he took possession of the same on 24 January.

According to the order, the Advocate General has undertaken that that district administration of Varanasi will maintain law and order in pursuance of the order dated 31 January. In the appeal filed before the court, board of trustees of Sri Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Acharya Ved Vyas Peeth Temple complex have been made respondents.

The Varanasi court had ruled on Wednesday that a priest can perform prayers before the idols in the southern cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque.

—PTI

Uttara Kannada sees 31 cases of monkey fever

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

Thirty-one cases of monkey fever have been reported from Karnataka's Uttara Kannada district in the last 15 days, health officials said on Friday.

Among those infected, 12 patients are admitted in hospitals while the rest are being treated at home. According to the officials, all of them are stable, and no serious case has been reported so far. Most of the cases were reported from Siddapur taluk.

The first case of Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), also known as monkey fever, was reported on 16 January, officials said.

According to officials, monkey fever spreads due to the bites of ticks that generally survive on monkeys. This tick bites humans which causes the infection. Humans also contract the disease by coming in contact with cattles bitten by ticks.

Authorities are carrying out door-to-door awareness programmes about the precautions to be taken. Those living in and around the forest area need to be more careful as they are at high risk of contracting this disease, they said.

Uttara Kannada District Health Officer Dr Neeraj B, said, "Once you contract monkey fever, you develop symptoms in the next three to five days which could be high fever, severe body ache, headache, redness of eyes, cold and cough".

"Our medical officers and field staff have done multiple meetings at the Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat level. All our taluk and district hospitals are equipped with facilities to deal with such cases," he said. *—PTI*

SAYS MOVE TO HC

No SC relief for Soren; sent to 5-day ED remand

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

In a setback to former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren, Supreme Court on Friday refused to interfere with his arrest by the ED in a money laundering case and asked him to approach the high court.

A special bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna, MM Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi asked senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Soren, to seek relief from high court.

The bench, however, was not inclined to entertain the petition and ordered that Soren can approach the high court under Article 226 of the Constitution for relief.

"We are informed that petitioner has already preferred a writ petition before the Jharkhand high court, which is still pending. It will also be open to him to ask for expeditious listing and disposal of the case," the bench ordered.

Supreme Court *PHOTO: PTI*

Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for the ED, said a special bench was constituted by the apex court to hear Soren's petition.

PMLA court grants 5-day ED remand to Soren

Former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren was on Friday remanded to five days' Enforcement Directorate custody by a special PMLA court. *—PTI*

Champai takes oath as J'khand CM

RANCHI, 2 FEB

JMM legislature party leader Champai Soren on Friday took oath as the Chief Minister of Jharkhand. He was administered the oath of office by Governor CP Radhakrishnan at the Raj Bhavan here. Along with Champai Soren, senior Congress leader Alamgir Alam and RJD leader Satyanand Bhokta took oath as state ministers. The oath-taking ceremony was held at the Raj Bhavan. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

CM TO LEAD CONGRESS PROTEST IN DELHI AGAINST 'INJUSTICE' TO K'TAKA

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

Congress in Karnataka would stage a demonstration in New Delhi on 7 February against the "injustice" done to the State by the Centre in releasing its share of central grants, DK Shivakumar said on Friday. The Deputy Chief Minister said the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah would lead the agitation and 138 MLAs, the Congress MLCs and MPs will take part in it. "All the 136 MLAs plus two MLAs and the MLCs will reach New Delhi on 6 Feb ruary and stage a demonstration on 7 February," Shivakumar told reporters here. He appealed to all the MPs to take part in the agitation keeping aside their political differences and party affiliation. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

BMTC bus runs over student in B'luru

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

A 21- year-old student, was mowed down by a Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) bus on Friday. The deceased Kusumitha, a second-year engineering student at JSS Academy of Technical Education was on her way to college when the accident took place.

According to police reports, the incident ocurred around 8.30 am near Harishchandra Ghat in Rajajinagar area, when she was on her way on scooter. She was rushed to the hospital by bystanders. Sarah Fatima, Deputy Commissioner of Police Traffic-East, alleged that the bus had dragged the victim for a short distance before she succumbed to her injuries. The driver fled the scene following the accident. A case has been registered at the Malleswaram police station. Police are inspecting the CCTV visuals from a nearby shop. Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy has directed the officials to take disciplinary action against the BMTC driver. *—PTI*

Kusumitha *PHOTO: SALAR*

BOX OFFICE TO BALLOT

Vijay takes political plunge, eyes 2026 TN polls

CHENNAI, 2 FEB

Top Tamil star Vijay on Friday announced the launch of his political party in the state, following a string of film industry personalities into politics, and setting his sights on winning the 2026 Assembly elections.

In a statement here, the 49-year-old actor announced the launch of his party 'Tamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam', expressing concern over the current political situation that is "fraught with administrative deterioration, corruption and divisive politics" that impedes unity.

Setting his target on electoral success in the 2026 Assembly elections in the state, the actor -- now turned politician -- claimed that the people of Tamil Nadu are "yearning" for a change.

"Under my leadership, the political party Tamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam has been launched. An application has been made with the Election Commission of India for registering it," he said. When the term of the incumbent DMK government ends in 2026, his party will enter the fray for the assembly polls, Vijay, who will be the president of TVK, said, adding that the outfit would not offer support to anyone in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Both the ruling DMK and the opposition BJP conveyed their best wishes to the actor on his new career path. Avid fans of 'Thalapathy,' as Vijay is known, welcomed his move to start a political party and celebrated it, expressing their joy on the streets as well as social media platforms.

Vijay *PHOTO: PTI*

- Setting his target on electoral success in the 2026 Assembly elections in the state, the actor -- now turned politician -- claimed that the people of Tamil Nadu are "yearning" for a change.

Thalapathy means General or Commander, while 'Tamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam' loosely translates to "Tamil Nadu Victory Party'.

"People of Tamil Nadu are yearning for a political movement that would pave the way for a selfless, transparent, visionary and efficient administration that is free of corruption, and caste and religious differences," he said.

Furthermore, he said, only a people's movement can usher in a political change that, among other things, would ensure Tamil Nadu's rights. Vijay, said it has been a long-held desire of his to wholeheartedly help the people of Tamil Nadu, who, apart from his parents, gave him name and fame. *—PTI*

1 arrested for desecration of Tipu Sultan portrait

RAICHUR, 2 FEB

Sirawara police arrested an accused in connection with a case in which portrait of Tipu Sultan near Hazrat Tipu Sultan Circle in Sirwar town was desecrated on 31 January, Following the incident, police registered a case and formed two teams to track down the miscreants. Akash Talwar, a resident of Sirwara town, was arrested based on CCTV visuals. Talwar has been remanded to judicial custody.The incident sparked public outrage. Raichur-Lingasuguru road witnessed blockades with burning tires, creating a tense situation. The protest subsided only after the police assured the arrest and punishment of those involved in the act. Local MLA G Hampaiah later garlanded the nameplate of Tipu Sultan. Superintendent of Police, Raichur B Nikhil said the accused committed this act under the influence of alcohol.—*Salar News*

Lion dies at Tyavarekoppa sanctuary

SHIVAMOGGA, 2 FEB

Sarvesha, a lion at Tyavarekoppa Tiger and Lion Sanctuary in Shivamogga died due to health ailments. He was a 13-year-old lion and was known for being the centre of attraction at the sanctuary. Despite his age, Sarvesha was considered healthy, and his sudden demise has shocked the caretakers and animal lovers. The lion showed signs of distress when he vomited on Thursday. Though immediate medical attention was provided by the veterinary doctors from the medical college, along with the sanctuary's medical team, Sarvesha couldn't survive.Sarvesha was part of the sanctuary for the last six years. Mukund Chand, the director of the sanctuary, said that the cause of his death could be due to a disease called Haemoprotozoan, a parasite. For further investigation, the lion's organs have been sent to a laboratory.—*Salar News*

Woman steals jewellery worth ₹8.51L from sister

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

A woman was arrested for stealing gold jewellery from her elder sister. The accused is Chandra Sharma. The incident took place on a moving train when the family was returning from Kerala to Bengaluru after a function. The incident unfolded when Chandra stole the jewellery from her sister Lalitha's bag. Lalitha, a homemaker from Nagavarapalaya, Bengaluru, realised that her jewellery was missing after she reached the City and lodged complaint at Cantonment Railway Police station. When cops questioned Chandra, the theft came to light, said Superintendent of Police SK Soumyalatha. 94 grams of gold worth Rs 8.51 lakh were seized.—*Salar News*

KSRTC to get 100 new buses to replace 15-year-old vehicles

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation(KSRTC) is set to introduce 100 new Ashvamedha diesel buses--an upgraded version of the Sarige non-AC buses--on Monday. The buses will be inaugurated by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, and Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy in front of Vidhana Soudha on Monday.These new buses will operate in various districts and can accommodate 52 passengers with increased leg space between seat rows. Equipped with sensors, emergency buttons, and LED destination boards on front name boards, the Ashvamedha buses aim to enhance the overall travel experience in the State. Recently, the Dharwad bench of High Court instructed KSRTC to acquire annual fitness certificates.—*Salar News*

CM to protest in Delhi against 'injustice' to K'taka

On 7 Feb, Congress will protest against Centre not releasing grants

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

Congress in Karnataka would stage a demonstration in New Delhi on 7 February against the "injustice" done to the State by the Centre in releasing its share of central grants, DK Shivakumar said on Friday.

The Deputy Chief Minister said the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah would lead the agitation and 138 MLAs, the Congress MLCs and MPs will take part in it.

"All the 136 MLAs plus two MLAs and the MLCs will reach New Delhi on 6 February and stage a demonstration on 7 February," Shivakumar told reporters here.

He appealed to all the MPs to take part in the agitation keeping aside their political differences and party affiliation.

According to him, a letter has been written to the authorities in Delhi seeking permission to stage the demonstration on 7 February.

Explaining the reason, Shivakumar said, "In the last five years, Rs 62,000 crore of our money has not reached us. This reduction in Karnataka's share of central grants happened even during the 'double engine' government when BJP government was in power both in the State as well as at the Centre."

More than 200 out of 236 taluks in Karnataka are reeling under severe drought but yet the Centre has not sanctioned any relief assistance to the State, he said.

He said fighting for the State's rights has become imperative in the given situation.

"The size of the Union budget which was 24.5 lakh crore in 2018-19 has doubled in 2023-24 to 45 lakh crores but the State's grants have only gone up from Rs 46,000 crore in 2018-19 to Rs 50,000 in 2022-23."

"Karnataka is one of the most progressive states with the second highest tax contribution to the exchequer. Though 27 of the 28 MPs from the State are from BJP, they haven't been able to get justice for the State," he said.

As per a recent survey, Karnataka was getting a share of 4.71 per cent as per the 14th Finance Commission but it has been reduced to 3.64 per cent in the 15th Finance Commission, he alleged.

"The Centre had announced Rs 5,200 crore for the Upper Bhadra project but no funds have been released yet.

They had also promised to provide funds for Bengaluru Metro but nothing has happened. I have written to the Union ministers concerned but haven't got any reply," he claims.

'Always an Indian'

Asked about BJP seeking an apology from DK Suresh, he said, "I was born as an Indian and will die an Indian.

BJP is trying to politicise the issue as Suresh was only warning the Centre that such a situation may arise if the injustice continues towards Karnataka and other southern states."

—*Salar News*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah would lead the agitation and 138 MLAs will participate **PHOTO: PTI**

IT, CBI & ED are functioning as BJP 'affiliates', alleges CM

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah alleged on Friday that the Income Tax (I-T) department, CBI and ED are functioning as BJP's "affiliates" and no longer autonomous agencies, as he hit out at the party-led NDA government. The senior Congress leader's charge comes following the arrest of the JMM executive president Hemant Soren by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land fraud after he resigned as Jharkhand Chief Minister.He also said BJP does not know anything other than 'Operation' to come to power.Taking a dig at former chief minister Jagadish Shettar and BJP state president B Y Vijayendra's statements that many Congress leaders will join the saffron party, the Chief Minister alleged the BJP knows how to buy MLAs by paying them money. —*Salar News*

'SEPARATE COUNTRY' ROW

Won't tolerate division of nation: Kharge

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

PHOTO: ANI

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday condemned the "separate country" remark of party MP DK Suresh.

"Anyone who speaks of breaking the country can't be tolerated, regardless of which party he belongs to. Mallikarjun Kharge will be the first to say that from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, we are one and we will remain one," he said.

Meanwhile, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi demanded an apology from Congress leader Sonia Suresh's demand for a separate nation comprising southern states by alleging bias in budgetary allocations.

Raising the issue during the Zero Hour in Parliament, Joshi said Congress member Suresh's remarks were an insult to the Constitution and its architect Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Members of the opposition INDIA bloc, including the Congress and the DMK, were on their feet trying to make some point as Joshi made the statement in the House. They later walked out for a brief while.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla called the Opposition members to make their point after laying of parliamentary papers on the table of the House.

Union Minister Piyush Goyal also sought an apology from Congress,

Raising the issue in the Rajya Sabha when it met for the day, Goyal said the statement by D K Suresh, who is the brother of Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, reflects the "divisive" thinking of Congress.

Goyal, who is the minister for commerce and industry, said even for fighting an election an oath of affirmation to the Constitution of India is required. After being elected, MPs have to take an oath of allegiance to the Constitution and that of upholding sovereignty and integrity of the country, he added. Without naming Suresh, he said the statement cannot be ignored as it is an attack on the Constitution of India and an insult to the sovereignty and integrity of the country. —*PTI*

A wild elephant from Karnataka strayed into Mananthavady town in Kerala on Friday **PHOTO: SALAR**

Wild jumbo from K'taka strays into Ker

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

A wild elephant, from Karnataka, on Friday strayed into the heart of Mananthavady town in Kerala, creating panic in the area. As Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) of the Forest Department kept track of the pachyderm, Kerala Forest Minister AK Saseendran said officials are working tirelessly to resolve the situation.

He said that the elephant, wearing a radio collar, came from Karnataka and therefore, the Wayanad Collector has been asked to seek the help of authorities from that state to solve the issue.

Saseendran also said that children who had already reached schools were asked to remain there and those who have not, were asked to stay home.

Prohibitory orders were also issued in the area by the district administration.

The minister said that the process of tranquillising the elephant if required, has also begun.

He urged people to cooperate with the forest officials to ensure the situation is resolved safely.

Later, visuals on TV channels showed forest officials monitoring the elephant as it moved around in a small residential area surrounded by banana plantations.

—*PTI*

Metro to start services at 4.30am on 4 Feb

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

To ensure convenient travel for participants attending the CAN WALK and XL Runathon events on World Cancer Day scheduled for Sunday in the city, the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) has announced an early commencement of Metro train services.

Instead of the usual 7 am start time, Metro services will begin at 4.30 am from all four terminal stations. BMRCL has urged both print and electronic media to provide wide publicity of this information to ensure awareness among the general public and metro users. —*Salar News*

17-year-old boy kills mom after she denies breakfast

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

A 17-year-old boy killed his 40-year-old mother with a metal rod and surrendered himself at the police station. The incident occurred near Justice Bheemaiah Layout around 7.30am on Friday after the mother denied him breakfast over a heated argument.Pavan, a diploma student at a private college, had asked his mother to serve him breakfast while he prepared for classes. However, the morning took an awful turn as a heated exchange of words led to the murder. Reportedly, Nethra, the mother, scolded her son and expressed her frustration, stating, "You are not my son; I won't feed you," police said. An enraged Pavan then struck his mother on the head with a rod. The son later surrendered to the cops, a police official said. The case falls under the KR Puram jurisdiction.

—*Salar News*

K'taka gets four new tele-ICU units

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar with Dinesh Gundu Rao at the inauguration of Tele ICUs at Victoria Hospital on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

The State has set up four Telemedicine Clusters units in Bengaluru, Mysuru, Hubballi, and Ballari to enhance healthcare accessibility in rural areas.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao inaugurated these units on Friday.

Gundurao said that 10 tele-ICU beds have been arranged in these 41 taluk hospitals and super-specialty care will be available to patients with the advice of expert doctors through AI technologies.

The Telemedicine Intensive Care Unit (Tele-ICU) is a system where the doctors can monitor the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) using audio–video and electronic links to treat the patients. During the

Currently, Bengaluru has nine of these;Mysuru has 13; Hubballi has 10; and Ballari has nine along with two smart ICU hospitals.

Shivakumar said the initiative is a revolutionary step in healthcare and he added that over 11,000 people have been treated through tele-ICU this year.

Speaking at the inauguration he said, "Karnataka is at the forefront of healthcare in the country and the State has made a name for itself in health tourism too," he said.

"By the time patients are brought to Bengaluru or some other large city for treatment it would be too late.

This facility is a boon for people in villages. Tele-ICUs must be set up at all the taluk headquarters."

Commenting on allegations over government ambulances being used by private hospitals, he said, "I have instructed health officers to look into this and track the ambulance drivers."

— *Salar News*

Police issues guidelines for PG accommodations

BENGALURU, 2 FEB

Police have issued guidelines regarding stays in guest houses (Paying Guest Houses) in City on Friday. The guidelines said that PG owners should ensure the mandatory acquisition of the requisite license (trade license) from BBMP, Collect identity cards and recent photographs of all individuals; record details of blood relatives, along with their mobile numbers through computerization, and maintain a separate log for visitors (including relatives/public).

According to a press release from the City police Commissioner, it asked to comply with the Karnataka Public Safety Act-2017 by installing CCTV cameras and implementing necessary safety measures to address fire hazards, strictly prohibit illegal activities such as the consumption and storage of drugs. Display prominently the phone numbers of essential services, including the local police station, emergency response (112), medical services (103), cybercrime (1930), etc. Additionally, ensure the availability of first aid equipment.

The other guidelines detailed on background checks, including police verification, for individuals recruited for duties such as cooks, security guards, and others. Recruitment should only proceed after address verification and obtaining information about blood relatives.

It also directed to maintain properdocumentation for such information. In the case of foreign nationals residing in the PG, it is necessary to provide information to the local police station directly or through online, as per Form "C" under the Registration of Foreigners Rules, 1939. The release also stated to admit only those individuals who have been authorized to reside in the establishment.

—*Salar News*

Hanuman dhwaja campaign launched

MANGALURU, 2 FEB

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal have launched a campaign to hoist Hanuman dhwaja across the State till 9 Feburary to protest against the government removing a saffron flag, which replaced the National Tricolour, from a flagpost at Keragodu in Mandya district.

In a statement here, Bajrang Dal regional Chief KR Sunil said the Hanuman dhwaja (flag) was hoisted at VHP office 'Vishwasri' in Mangaluru on Friday as part of the protest.

He said the Hanuman dhwaja will be hoisted at all temples, mandirs, Hindu religious institutions, offices of VHP and Bajrang Dal across the state during the campaign.

VHP and Bajrang Dal activists will submit a memorandum to the Mandya deputy commissioner to urge the state government to allow hoisting of Hanuman dhwaja at Keragodu as well. The outfits will also arrange chanting of Hanuman Chalisa across the state on 10 Feburary, he said. —*PTI*

JUST FOR HITS

Youtubers make school girl clean toilet for viral video

CHINTAMANI, 2 FEB

Some YouTube videographers had asked one of the female students to clean the toilet **PHOTO: IANS**

According to Block Educational officer, S Umadevi, some YouTube videographers had asked one of the female students to clean the toilet and had videographed the same which has been made viral.

Villagers said that elections for the Milk Producers Co-operative were held on Thursday and some of the YouTubers who came to cover the elections had asked students to clean the toilet and had videographed it.

Puneeth, Sub Inspector, Bathalahalli police station said so far he has not received any complaint in this regard either against the teaching staff or against the YouTubers. Meanwhile, Bylanjappa, DDPI, Chikkaballapur said he has sought a detailed report from the Block Educational officer and once the report is submitted he would take proper action against the concerned.

Earlier, the Head Mistress of a Higher Primary School at Kuduvakote village in Sidlagatta taluk was suspended for making a girl student clean the toilet on 29 January.

Also, incidents where students belonging to Scheduled Castes were made to clean the soak pit at Morarji Desai residential school in Yaluvahalli in Kolar taluk were reported in December last year. Following this criminal cases under the provisions of the SC/ST Act were filed against the teachers and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah during his visit to Kolar a few days later directed the police to take necessary actions against all involved in the case. —*Salar News*

Villagers stop illegal limestone mining

MADIKERI, 2 FEB

Residents of Thorenur village in Kushalnagar taluk confronted illegal limestone mining on Wednesday night, bringing the unlawful activity to a halt.

Soon after, the local police seized the vehicle involved and initiated an investigation. Reports revealed that the heavy machines were operating in the old quarry sites within the village boundaries. Shivakumar, a farmer, raised serious concerns alleging that the mining operations were conducted during the night and it had caused significant damage to the agricultural land. He added that the mining activity has left the agricultural land unsuitable for cultivation. The villagers said that they had lodged many complaints with the higher officials and their concerns were ignored, hence they decided to take control of the situation among themselves. Officials of Mines and Geology Department said they had previously stopped such illegal activities on eight different occasions and fines up to Rs 8 lakh were imposed, yet the issue persisted. The officials also reassured the villagers that strict action would be taken against those responsible.

—*Salar News*

Notice sent to Kejri on accusations against BJP

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

A Delhi Police crime branch team has arrived at Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence to serve him a notice in connection with a probe over his claim that the BJP was trying to buy some AAP MLAs, official sources said.A team of Crime Branch officials have reached Kejriwal's residence to serve him the notice related to the inquiry, they said.In a post on X, Kejriwal had claimed last week that seven of his party MLAs had been contacted by the "them".Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said, "This shows how much politically desperate Kejriwal has become."—*PTI*

HC permits Moitra to withdraw plea against eviction

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

The Delhi High Court on Friday allowed expelled Lok Sabha MP Mahua Moitra to withdraw her petition challenging the eviction notice issued by the Directorate of Estates (DoE) asking her to vacate the government accommodation allotted to her. Moitra's counsel said the plea has become infructuous as she has already vacated the premises. "Petitioner is already stated to have vacated the accommodation in question. Petition is dismissed as withdrawn," said Justice Sachin Datta. The TMC leader moved out of the government bungalow on 19 January after the high court refused to grant her any interim relief. On January 18, the high court had dismissed Moitra's application seeking to restrain the authorities from evicting her from the government bungalow on cancellation of her allotment following her expulsion, on medical grounds. The high court, however, said the issue of expulsion of petitioner was pending before the Supreme Court and the issue of extension of time to vacate the government accommodation was inextricably linked with that and as on date, she "has no right". —*PTI*

Bhujbal denies claims of being sidelined in party

MUMBAI, 2 FEB

Senior Maharashtra minister Chhagan Bhujbal on Friday dismissed claims of being sidelined within the Ajit Pawar-led NCP group, an ally of the ruling coalition, despite criticising the state government's handling of the Maratha quota agitation. Bhujbal, the Minister of Food, Civil Supplies, and Consumer Protection, asserted his standing within the party, saying that no one has opposed him and that Ajit Pawar, deputy chief minister, supported his advocacy for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Responding to Shiv Sena MLA Sanjay Gaikwad's call to "kick" him out of the state cabinet, Bhujbal, a prominent Other Backward Classes leader, acknowledged the right of anyone to demand his resignation, emphasising his longstanding commitment to the OBC cause without expecting anything in return. —*PTI*

Not a single person died of hunger in 10 yrs: BJP leader

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Not a single person died of hunger in the country in the last 10 years, Union minister and BJP leader SP Singh Baghel has claimed, while accusing the Congress of not taking measures to eradicate poverty. Speaking during a debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address, the Minister of State for Health hit out at former prime ministers Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. Baghel said while he acknowledges Rajiv Gandhi to be an "innocent prime minister", he would also characterise him as an "incompetent" one because it was his duty to prevent corruption and ensure that theft does not occur under his government. Hitting out at former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, he said despite giving the slogan of 'garibi hatao', He said not a single person out of 140 crore Indians has died of hunger in the last 10 years.—*PTI*

Champai Soren takes oath as J'khand CM; trust vote on 5 Feb

38 MLAs flew to Hyderabad to prevent any poaching attempt

RANCHI, 2 FEB

After two days of political uncertainty, JMM legislature party leader Champai Soren on Friday was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Jharkhand and the JMM-led coalition government will seek a vote of confidence on 5 February.

Along with Champai Soren, senior Congress leader Alamgir Alam and RJD leader Satyanand Bhokta were sworn in as state ministers by Governor CP Radhakrishnan at the Raj Bhavan. Immediately after the swearing-in, 38 lawmakers of the ruling alliance were flown to Hyderabad to prevent any poaching attempt by the BJP in the run-up to the trust vote.

In its first cabinet meeting, the Champai Soren-led coalition government decided to seek a vote of trust on Monday. The governor gave 10 days to Champai Soren to prove a majority in the assembly, prompting the alliance to shift its MLAs from Jharkhand, a legislator said.

A senior leader of the coalition said:"The decision to shift the legislators to Hyderabad, the capital of Congress-ruled Telangana, was taken considering that the opposition BJP may make attempts to poach them."

It was not immediately known where the ruling coalition MLAs would be accommodated. —*PTI*

JMM leader Champai Soren signs documents after taking oath as Jharkhand CM during the swearing-in ceremony, at Raj Bhawan in Ranchi on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Champai Soren: From humble farm worker to J'khand's top post

RANCHI, 2 FEB

- Champai Soren is the seventh person to become Jharkhand's chief minister and the third from the JMM

Champai Soren, who once tilled fields with his father in a remote village in Jharkhand's Seraikela-Kharsawan district, has ascended to the chair of the state's chief minister.

The 67-year-old tribal leader has earned the sobriquet "Jharkhand's Tiger" for his contribution to the long fight for the creation of a separate state in the 1990s. Jharkhand was created from the southern part of Bihar in 2000.

A loyalist of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha president Shibu Soren, Champai became the leader of the JMM legislative party after Hemant Soren's resignation as the chief minister by the ED in a money laundering case and his subsequent arrest on the night of 31 January.

He is the seventh person to become Jharkhand's chief minister and the third from the JMM to reach that post after Shibu Soren and his son Hemant.

"I used to work in farms along with my father (Simal Soren)... Now fate has offered me a different role," Champai Soren told PTI after being elected as the leader of the JMM legislative party. —*PTI*

CONG, OTHER PARTIES WALK OUT OF RS

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Opposition parties led by the Congress on Friday walked out from the Rajya Sabha over the Jharkhand Governor not making interim arrangements for governance in the state after JMM leader Hemant Soren resigned as Chief Minister.

Leader of the Opposition in the House and Congress president Mallikharjun Kharge drew parallels with the happenings in neighbouring Bihar just a week back when Nitish Kumar had resigned as chief minister, his resignation being immediately accepted, he being asked to continue till a new government was formed and again being sworn-in as the chief minister, all in a matter of 12 hours.

But in Jharkhand, when Soren resigned on Wednesday, no interim arrangement was made, he said.

After Soren's resignation, the name of his successor with signatures of 43 supporting MLAs in a 81-member assembly was given, Kharge said and added that four other MLAs, who were supporting such a transfer, were outside the state and could not give their signatures. —*PTI*

C'GARH MAYORAL POLLS

SC to consider AAP's plea for urgent hearing

AAP, Congress councillors protest after result was declared in the Chandigarh mayoral polls, in Chandigarh on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to consider an AAP councillor's request seeking urgent hearing of his plea challenging a Punjab and Haryana High Court order that refused to grant any interim relief to the party seeking fresh mayoral polls in Chandigarh.

The matter was mentioned before a bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud by senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for councillor Kuldeep Kumar, a candidate for the mayor's post.Singhvi submitted that the returning officer was caught on video smudging the ballots.BJP swept the Chandigarh mayoral polls, retaining all three posts.On Wednesday, a division bench of Justices Sudhir Singh and Harsh Bunger of the high court denied interim relief the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which alleged that ballot papers had been tampered with and sought fresh polls under the supervision of a retired judge of the court. The high court issued notices to the Chandigarh administration, the municipal corporation, presiding officer Anil Masih and newly-elected mayor Manoj Sonkar, among others, asking then to file their replies within three weeks.

AAP councillor Kumar filed the appeal in the top court against the denial of interim relief and listing of the plea after three weeks. —*PTI*

> **"if it can "rig" the Chandigarh mayoral polls, it could go to any extent in assembly and Lok Sabha elections."**
>
> -Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi Chief Minister

Doubt Cong will get even 40 seats in LS polls: Didi

KOLKATA, 2 FEB

In a scathing attack, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday challenged the Congress to take on the BJP in the Hindi heartland states and said she has doubts whether the grand old party will secure "even 40 seats" in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Banerjee also criticised the Congress's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, which traversed through the state's six districts, comparing it to a "mere photo opportunity" for "migratory birds" who have descended upon the state.

"I proposed that Congress contest 300 seats (across the country where BJP is the main opposition), but they refused to heed. Now, they've arrived in the state to stir up Muslim voters. I doubt whether they will secure even 40 seats if they contested 300," Banerjee asserted.

Speaking during a dharna in Kolkata to demand the clearance of the state's dues by the Centre, Banerjee reiterated that her party was willing to form an alliance with the Congress for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal, but highlighted that it was the grand old party which declined her offer.

"We were open to an alliance, offering them two seats which they rejected. Now let them contest in all 42 seats alone. Since then, there has been no dialogue between us," she remarked.

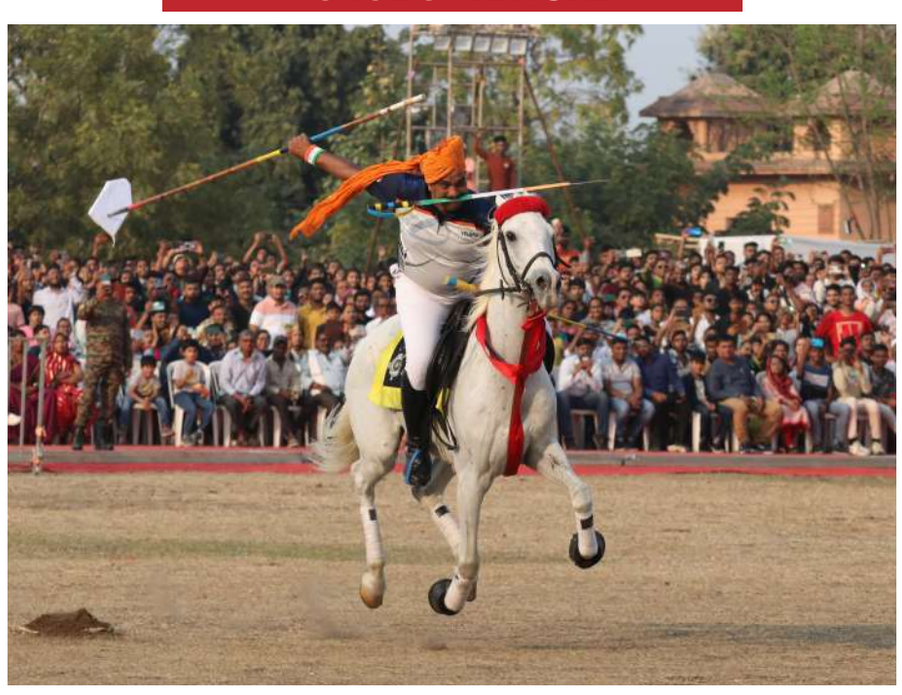
Mamata Banerjee **PHOTO:PTI**

Didi sits on Dharna

Mamata Banerjee began a dharna in Kolkata on Friday, demanding the state's "dues" from the Centre for various social welfare schemes.

A tent has been put up beside the podium so that she can attend to urgent administrative needs, officials said. —*PTI*

FORCE OF NATURE



An Indian Army official show his skills at the inauguration ceremony of the 'Shaurya Sandhya' military and combat display event, in Nagpur, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

KER OPPOSITION BOYCOTTS ASSEMBLY

Veena Vijayan **PHOTO:PTI**

T'PURAM, 2 FEB

The Congress-led United Democratic Front Opposition on Friday boycotted the assembly proceedings after Speaker AN Shamseer rejected notice for an adjournment motion moved to discuss the investigation against the now-defunct IT company of Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's daughter.

Soon after the question hour, Congress MLA Mathew Kuzhalnadan moved the notice for adjournment motion to discuss the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO)'s probe into Vijayan's daughter Veena Thaikkandiyil and her company Exalogic Solutions Private Limited.

However, Shamseer rejected the notice citing Rule 53 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of business in the Kerala Legislative Assembly.

Shamseer said as per the provision, no motion which seeks to raise discussion on matters pending before any statutory tribunal or authority shall ordinarily be permitted to be moved.As the notice was rejected, the opposition members trooped into the well of the House carrying placards and banners against the chief minister and waved it before the Speaker's dais.

One of the banners read -- 'Kerala looted by PV and company'. —*PTI*

Determined to end BJP's rule: Stalin

CHENNAI, 2 FEB

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, currently in Spain on an official trip to attract investments into the state, invoked party founder CN Annadurai's name on Friday and said his DMK was determined to end the BJP rule at the Centre.Stating that he would not be in a position to join the party cadres in taking out a peace march on Annadurai's death anniversary on 3 February, owing to his overseas visit, Stalin who is the president of DMK said his party has traditionally been observing the leader's death anniversary for over half-a-century."This practice is not a mere ritual started by former chief minister M Karunanidhi but an opportunity to gain strength to continue on the path of victory to achieve the goals for which Anna launched the DMK," he said. —*PTI*

MK Stalin **PHOTO:PTI**

Will ban polygamy in Assam soon: CM

GUWAHATI, 2 FEB

The Assam government will introduce a bill to end polygamy in the state during the upcoming budget session of the assembly, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Friday.Addressing a press conference here, Sarma said the draft of the bill is being scrutinised by the Law Department at present.

"We are lining up an act to ban polygamy in the state during the budget session of the assembly. It is with the Law Department for vetting," he said.Sarma said his government was looking forward to the legislation on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), which will be considered during a special four-day session of the Uttarakhand assembly starting from 5 February.The budget session of the Assam assembly will begin on 5 February. —*PTI*

INDIAN NAVY FOILS PIRACY ATTEMPT AGAIN

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

The Indian Navy foiled a piracy attempt on an Iranian-flagged, fishing vessel along the East coast of Somalia, officials said on Friday.Indian warship INS Sharda came to the rescue of the vessel FV Omaril with 11 Iranian and eight Pakistani crew members after it came under attack from pirates, they said.INS Sharda intercepted the vessel in early hours of Friday and used her integral helo and boats to coerce the pirates for safe release of crew along with the vessel, he said.

The ship has ensured successful release of the 11 Iranian and eight Pakistani crew members, he said. —*PTI*

Truck drivers to get 1,000 resting centres on highways

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

PHOTO:PTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said the government is working on a new scheme to develop modern facilities for truck and taxi drivers on the highways and construct 1,000 centres in the first phase.

These facilities on the national highways would offer resting place, toilet, and drinking water for the drivers.

While addressing the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2024, he drew the industry's attention towards the hardships faced by the drivers.

"Drivers are an important part of the mobility sector. They drive for long hours but they do not have access to proper resting place... They do not get adequate time to take rest and sometimes this leads to road accidents," Modi said.

He noted that the government understands the concern of truck drivers and their families.

There is a "new scheme" in the works to develop modern buildings with facilities for food, clean drinking water, toilets, parking and rest for drivers on all national highways, Modi said.

The government is preparing to build 1,000 such buildings across the country in the first phase of this scheme, he said.

He said the initiative will give a boost to both the ease of living and ease of travelling for truck and taxi drivers, thereby improving their health and also help in preventing accidents.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has already issued a notification mandating that all new trucks manufactured on or after October 1, 2025, to be equipped with air-conditioned cabins for drivers. —*PTI*

UPI GOES GLOBAL

UPI's global launch at iconic Eiffel Tower

PARIS, 2 FEB

- UPI is an instant payment system developed by the National Payments Corporation of India

India on Friday formally launched UPI at the iconic Eiffel Tower here, terming it as taking Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "vision of taking UPI global."

Unified Payments Interface is an Indian instant payment system developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) in 2016.

"UPI formally launched at the iconic Eiffel Tower at the huge Republic Day Reception. Implementing PM @narendramodi's announcement & the vision of taking UPI global," the official X handle of India's Embassy in France posted along with the photos of the event.

UPI is a system that powers multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application merging several banking features, into one hood, according to NPCI.

Emmanuel Macron, President of France, was the Chief Guest for the 75th Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi on 26 January.

"The new energy in India-France ties from a historic year in the Strategic Partnership visible at 75th Republic Day réception!," the official handle X posted and thanked the Minister Delegate in charge of Democratic Renewal, Government Spokesperson Prisca Thevenot for honouring the occasion. It also thanked the members of Parliament, business leaders, scholars, friends of India & Indians in France. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Kashmir towns record coldest night in 16 years

SRINAGAR, 2 FEB

The minimum temperatures nose-dived on Thursday night at several places in Kashmir with some towns recording the coldest night in past 16 years, officials said here on Friday.Gulmarg skiing resort in north Kashmir recorded a low of minus 12 degrees Celsius, a drop of more than four degrees compared to previous night's minus 7.6 degrees Celsius, the officials said. Pahalgam tourist resort in south Kashmir, which serves as the base camp for the annual Amarnath yatra, recorded a low of minus 11.9 degrees Celsius, a drop of 7.8 degrees from the previous night. Kokernag and Qazigund towns recorded minus 9.4 degrees Celsius, officials said.—*PTI*

Kerala child dies of arm fracture, parents cry foul

PATHANAMTHITTA, 2 FEB

A five-year-old boy died allegedly due to the administration of anesthesia at a private hospital here where he was taken following a fracture in his arm, police said on Friday. According to the parents and other family members of the child, the boy had fallen down while playing in school on Thursday. They claimed that it was the hospital which said that anesthesia was required to be administered to set right the fractured arm. "It was only a minor dislocation, but the hospital authorities said that the arm can be set by giving anesthesia. But our child died," a family member told TV channels.Police said it registered a case of unnatural death on the complaint.—*PTI*

HC directs Tihar Jail to ensure medical treatment to Yasin

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

The Delhi High Court on Friday directed Tihar Jail's Superintendent to ensure proper medical treatment for separatist leader Yasin Malik, serving a life sentence in a terror funding case. He claims to be suffering from serious cardiac and kidney problems. Justice Anoop Kumar Mendiratta has requested records to substantiate these claims, including a medical report, which is expected to be presented by the next hearing on 14 February.Advocate Rajat Nair, revealed that a medical board from All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) had been formed. However, he declined, expressing a preference for physical hospital visits.Nair said, "He was initially treated by different doctors, and the authorities unexpectedly changed the medical board". The court emphasised the jail to ensure treatment.—*PTI*

Prohibitory orders imposed around Mopa airport

CHENNAI, 29 JAN

On Friday, the North Goa district administration issued an order, effective until 31 March, prohibiting gatherings at Manohar International Airport (MIA) in Mopa and nearby villages. This measure aims to preempt potential protests by taxi operators. District magistrate Dr Sneha Gitte's order includes a ban on processions, possession of firearms, loudspeakers, sloganeering, and firecrackers near Mopa Airport police station.Gitte clarified that prior permission exempts public servants on duty and special occasions like marriage or funeral processions. The orders followed communication fromSuperintendent of Police (SP), Nidhin Valsan, highlighting the potential protests by taxi owners and villagers.—*PTI*

Court ruled in haste: AIMPLB on Gyanvapi issue

The reaction by the AIMPLB came soon after HC adjourned till 6 Feb

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) on Friday claimed that the Varanasi district court decision allowing Hindu prayers in a cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque was taken in "haste" and said it would pursue the matter right up to the Supreme Court to get justice.

Muslim organisations under the umbrella of AIMPLB also said the Places of Worship Act, 1991 should be implemented in letter and spirit to prevent disputes arising in the country.

The reaction by the AIMPLB came soon after the Allahabad High Court on Friday adjourned till 6 February hearing on an appeal filed by the Anzuman Intezamia Masjid Committee challenging the Varanasi court order.

The committee, which looks after the affairs of the mosque, had moved the High Court within hours of the Supreme Court refusing to hear its plea against the Varanasi district court's order and asking it to approach the High Court.

Police personnel stop Muslims as they gather to offer 'namaz' at Gyanvapi Mosque, in Varanasi on Friday PHOTO: PTI

All India Muslim Personal Law Board President Maulana Khalid Saifullah Rahmani said the incident of allowing puja at the mosque has pained not only Muslims but people of other religions as well who believe in secularism.

"The notion that a mandir (temple) was demolished to build a mosque is wrong. Islam does not allow taking away someone's land to build a mosque," he said.

"In the Babri Masjid decision, it was accepted that the temple was not brought down to build a mosque but the decision was made in the favour of the other side on the basis of 'aastha (faith)'. Courts should rule on the basis of facts and not 'aastha'," he said.

He said the Places of Worship Act is a very important law as "we can prevent disputes through it".If this is not implemented in its letter and spirit it will give rise to disputes in the country, the AIMPLB president said.—*PTI*

Gyanvapi row: Shops remained closed in Varanasi amid bandh

VARANASI, 2 FEB

Shops in the city's Muslim-dominated areas remained closed and the police sounded an alert in the entire district ahead of the Friday namaz, following the district court order to allow Hindu prayers in a cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque. High alert has been sounded in Varanasi district on the first Friday namaz after the district court's order. Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee, which looks after the affairs of the Gyanvapi mosque, had called for a bandh on Friday in the town. The effect of the bandh was visible in market areas in Dalmandi, Nai Sadak, Nadesar and Ardal Bazar.In a letter issued by the committee, it appealed for closure of the markets and asked people to offer namaz peacefully. It advised Muslim women to remain in their houses. Police Commissioner Ashok Mutha Jain held a meeting with police officials late last night on the security arrangements.Additional police force has been mobilised from neighbouring districts to maintain peace during the day. Additional security forces have been deployed near Kashi Vishwanath Dham and nearby areas. Rapid Police Force (RPF) has been placed in the sensitive areas.—*PTI*

INDIA'S SUICIDE HUB

Student dies by hanging in Kota, 3rd in 2 weeks

KOTA 2 FEB

- Noor Mohammed, 27, took the extreme step sometime on Wednesday but his body was recovered from his room

A final year BTech student allegedly committed suicide by hanging from a ceiling fan in his paying guest room in Rajasthan's Kota, police said on Friday.

Noor Mohammed,27, took the extreme step sometime on Wednesday but his body was recovered from his room in Vigyan Nagar area on Thursday night. No suicide note was recovered, they said.

This is the third suicide reported from Kota in two weeks.A native of Uttar Pradesh's Gonda, Mohammed was pursuing a BTech degree from SRM University, Chennai and lived as a paying guest here.Deputy superintendent of police (DSP) (Vigyan Nagar) Dharmveer Singh said Mohammed studied in coaching institutes in Kota to prepare for the entrance exam from 2016 to 2019 and after being admitted to SRM University, he used to take online classes from his Kota PG.

The police were informed about the incident at around 8pm on Thursday, Singh said.

The body has been placed in the mortuary for post-mortem, he said, adding that the student's family has been informed and they are on their way to Kota.So far three suicides have been reported in Kota this year. On 29 January, 18-year-old Niharika Singh preparing for JEE allegedly hanged herself at her home in this coaching hub, leaving behind a suicide note saying sorry to her parents and calling herself a "loser".On 23 January, 19-year-old Mohammed Zaid was found hanging in his hostel room in Kota.He had come to the city from Uttar Pradesh's Moradabad district a year back to prepare for the medical entrance exam NEET. Last year, 26 students allegedly committed suicide in Kota.—*PTI*

India-Maldives hold talks on troop issue

PATNA, 29 JAN

India and the Maldives are holding crucial talks on Friday with a focus on finding a mutually workable solution to enable continued operation of the Indian military platforms in the island nation, people familiar with the matter said.

The second meeting of the India-Maldives high level core group is underway in Delhi over two weeks after the first one in Male could not make any significant headway on the contentious matter. The core group meeting is underway with a focus on finding a mutually acceptable solution, one of the persons cited above said.

The two sides decided to set up the core group following a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Maldivian President Muizzu on the sidelines of the COP28 summit in Dubai in December.Last month, Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu asked India to withdraw all its military personnel from the island nation by 15 March.At present, around 80 Indian military personnel are in the Maldives primarily to operate two helicopters and an aircraft which carried out hundreds of medical evacuations and humanitarian missions.The ties between the two countries came under some strain since Muizzu came to power in November.After assuming charge, Muizzu, widely seen as a pro-China leader, maintained he will keep his election promise of evicting Indian military personnel from his country.Muizzu, 45, defeated India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.—*PTI*

PM in a meeting with President of Maldives Mohamed Muizzu PHOTO: AP

DRONE DEAL TO ENSURE MARITIME SECURITY: US

WASHINGTON, 2 FEB

Terming its partnership with India as among the most consequential ones, the US has said the proposed sale of 31 armed drones to New Delhi at an estimated cost of nearly USD 4 billion will ensure enhanced maritime security for the country.The US on Thursday approved the sale of 31 MQ-9B armed drones to India at an estimated cost of USD 3.99 billion, an acquisition that will bolster India's capability to meet current and future threats by enabling unmanned surveillance and reconnaissance patrols in sea lanes of operation.

"our partnership with India is one of our most consequential relationships. We work closely with India on our most vital priorities," State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said.—*PTI*

Both Delhi, Mumbai get bomb threat

MUMBAI/DELHI, 2 FEB

The Mumbai police are on alert and have launched a probe after a message claimed that bombs have been planted in the city and they would be set off, an official said on Friday.

The traffic control room at Worli received a message around 12.30 am on Friday, claiming that there would be blasts in Mumbai as bombs had been placed at six locations in the country's financial capital. The crime branch of Mumbai police and Maharashtra ATS (anti-terrorism squad) were alerted about the threat message, he said.

DPS RK Puram vacated after bomb threat on email

The Delhi Public School in RK Puram received a bomb threat on email following which the premises were immediately vacated and a search operation launched, police said on Friday.

A senior police officer said that they are searching the entire school premises and a bomb squad and dog squad were immediately rushed to the spot.

According to sources, the school received an email about two bombs on the premises at about 9 am after which the administration immediately informed the police about the matter.

The police evacuated the school and launched a search operation.—*PTI*

CBI REGISTERS CASE AGAINST ACTIVIST MANDER

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

The CBI has registered a case of alleged violation of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act against human rights activist Harsh Mander and his NGO and searched his premises on Friday, officials said.

The Home Ministry had stated that Section 3 of the FCRA prohibits acceptance of foreign contribution by correspondents, columnists, cartoonists, editor, owner, printer, publisher of a registered newspaper but Mander has been writing columns and articles in newspapers and web portals.

The CBI has registered the FIR against Mander and the Centre for Equity Studies (CES) for violation of various provisions of the FCRA.

Mander, former member of the Sonia Gandhi-led National Advisory Council during the erstwhile UPA government, is the founder of NGO Aman Biradari.

According to the Home Ministry, Aman Biradari is non-FCRA organisation.

The CES has acted as conduit for the transfer of foreign contribution to non-FCRA associations, it alleged.

"A report by the Centre for Equity Studies in collaboration with Delhi Research Group and 'Karwan-E-Mohabbat' was published by CES in June 2020.

Karwan-e Mohabbat is a campaign run under the non-FCRA association Aman Biradari Trust (ABT), which is closely associated with Centre of Equity Studies and Harsh Mander," the Home Ministry alleged.—*PTI*

LAWS HAVE PROVISIONS TO PROTECT DOCTORS FROM VIOLENCE: MANDAVIYA

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

"Existing laws have provisions to protect doctors from violence and doctors are considered as gods, their protection is important", Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Mansukh Mandaviya stated.

On Friday amid incidents of doctors being attacked while carrying out their duties the minister was responding to a query in the Lok Sabha by Congress leader Shashi Tharoor who sought a legislation to protect doctors and healthcare workers from violence at the workplace.Tharoor also demanded that victims of such violence be provided financial and legal support.

Union Health Minister Mandaviya said telemedicine is helping make healthcare more affordable for poor people PHOTO: PTI

In reply to additional questions related to telemedicine consultations, Mandaviya said telemedicine is helping make healthcare more affordable for poor people.

Citing a study, the minister said about 3-4 lakh people avail telemedicine consultations every day and the savings for one person is estimated to be little over Rs 900.

So far, more than 20 crore telemedicine consultations have taken place and that means there have been savings for people of over Rs 18,000 crore," Mandaviya said.—*PTI*

- Citing a study, the minister said about 3-4 lakh people avail telemedicine consultations every day

Gas leak at Mumbai chawl; 9 injured 3 critical

MUMBAI, 2 FEB

- The gas leak occurred in a chawl at Siddharth Colony inChembur East. A fire brigade official stated

Nine people, including four women, were injured in a fire that broke out after a gas leak in Mumbai's Chembur area, on Friday. Three of the injured people have suffered more than 50 per cent burns and are critical. The gas leak occurred in a chawl at Siddharth Colony in Chembur East. A fire brigade official stated that one fire engine, a jetty and ambulances were rushed to the spot and the fire was doused within few minutes. While six of them were admitted to the civic-run Rajawadi Hospital at Ghatkopar, one each was admitted to Sion hospital, Shatabdi hospital in Govandi and Manek hospital (Chembur), said the official. Five are stable, a 42-year-old man with minor injuries was discharged added the officials.—*PTI*

9.1L DEATHS RECORDED

India saw 14.1L new cancer cases: WHO

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

In 2022, India had more than 14.1 lakh new cancer cases and over 9.1 lakh deaths due to the disease, and breast cancer was the most common, according to the latest estimates of the disease's global burden by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Cancers of lip, oral cavity and lung were the most common ones in men, accounting for 15.6 and 8.5 per cent of the new cases, respectively, whereas, cancers of breast and cervix were the most frequent ones in women, making up close to 27 and 18 per cent of the new cases, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), WHO's cancer agency has estimated.

It also calculated that the number of people alive within five years following a cancer diagnosis was nearly 32.6 lakhs in India.

Cancers of lip, oral cavity and lungs were the most common ones in men PHOTO:PIXABAY

Globally, the agency estimated two crore new cancer cases and 97 lakh deaths, and about 5.3 crore people were alive within five years following a cancer diagnosis. About one in five people develop cancer in their lifetime, and roughly one in nine men and 1 in 12 women die from the disease, it said.

In India, the risk of developing cancer before turning 75 was calculated to be 10.6 per cent, while the risk of dying from cancer by the same age was found to be 7.2 per cent. Globally, these risks were 20 per cent and 9.6 per cent, respectively.

The IARC said that cervical cancer can be eliminated as a public health problem, through the scale-up of the WHO Cervical Cancer Elimination Initiative, whilst acknowledging the varying incidence levels of the disease.—*PTI*

'Immuno therapy may be most effective for cervical cancer'

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Immunotherapy may be the most effective treatment for cervical cancer when used early in the course of the disease, according to a research paper.The paper, published in the journal Gynecologic Oncology, noted that despite the availability of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines, cervical cancer remains the second highest cause of cancer mortality among women in low and middle-income countries.In India, cervical cancer is the second most common in women, making up close to 18 per cent of the new cancer cases, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), WHO's cancer agency has estimated.The US Food and Drug Administration has approved immunotherapy pembrolizumab in combination with chemotherapy and radiation therapy for treatment.—*PTI*

No handcuff symbol for criminal candidates

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

- A bench led by DY Chandrachud and comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra were disappointed reading the petition and had no intention of entertaining it. The counsel withdrew the case, and it was dismissed after bench indicated that it did-not consider it

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a PIL seeking an election symbol of handcuff for candidates with criminal records.

A bench led by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra were disappointed reading the petition and had no intention of entertaining it.

"How can we do it. This is a policy matter. We can't ask them to put election symbol of handcuff. You withdraw it," the Chief Justice stated.

"We indicated to the petitioner that he raises policy issues, therefore the court would not be inclined to entertain it," the bench said in its order.

The counsel withdrew the case, and it was dismissed after the bench indicated that it was not inclined to consider it.

The petitioner had Sudheer filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) with the highest court asking for a handcuff to be used as an election symbol for candidates with criminal histories.—*PTI*

GERMANY ON STRIKE

Subways are parked in a subway depot in Frankfurt, Germany, on Friday, as employees of public transport in Germany went on a one-day warning strike pressing for improved working conditions **PHOTO: PTI**

Is Opposition INDIA bloc on the brink of splitting?

In July, over two dozen Opposition parties formed a coalition to challenge the ruling BJP led by Narendra Modi in the upcoming general election.

Made up of the main Opposition Congress and smaller, regional parties, the coalition cleverly named itself INDIA, an acronym for a rather florid Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance.

The alliance's success hinged on the allies' ability to stick together and agree to a strategic seat-sharing arrangement, ensuring a unified front against the BJP with a single primary candidate in each constituency. In India's "first past the post" multiparty system where the winner takes it all, a fragmented Opposition always benefits a ruling incumbent - in the 2019 general election, Modi's party received 37 per cent of the popular ballot, but mopped up a whopping 303 of the 543 seats.

But barely six months after its birth, India's motley Opposition coalition is in disarray. The latest trigger was Nitish Kumar, a regional leader, exiting a state-level ruling coalition in the northern state of Bihar and re-joining the BJP. Kumar had previously departed from a BJP-led alliance 18 months ago. Now the BJP will bank on Kumar's Janata Dal (United) party to pick up a majority of the state's 40 seats.

"His departure is a big blow to the INDIA alliance. It also sends a signal that the alliance is not working," says Gilles Verniers, a scholar of Indian politics.

That's not all. Two regional leaders in the alliance, Mamata Banerjee of Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal and Arvind Kejriwal of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi and Punjab, have distanced themselves from the Congress and made it clear that they will go it alone in their respective states. In other words, minimal to no seat-sharing is expected in these states.

The turmoil in this infant alliance comes at a time when Modi looks unstoppable.

INDIA bloc including 27 political parties, main Opposition Congress and smaller, regional parties, was formed in July to challenge the ruling BJP led by Narendra Modi in the upcoming General Election **PHOTO: PTI**

In December, BJP swept Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in key state elections in India's sprawling Hindi-speaking heartland. In January, Modi appeared to mark the unofficial launch of the BJP's election campaign for the April and May polls by inaugurating the promised grand new Ram temple in Ayodhya.

"Things have changed dramatically for the BJP after December. The odds in favour of the party's electoral prospects in the elections have increased," says Rahul Verma of Centre for Policy Research, a Delhi-based think tank.

The fragility of the Opposition alliance stems, in part, from differing perspectives on the Congress party, led by Rahul Gandhi - it is the sole pan-Indian alternative to the BJP. The party secured less than 20 per cent of the vote and a mere 52 seats in 2019 and continues to struggle.

"It then makes unreasonable demands for seats that regional partners are unwilling to accommodate," says Verniers. "The perception is that the Congress is a toxic alliance partner because of its own weakness and ability to drag down the ticket."

Yet, seat-sharing is only part of the battle. Opposition, say scholars, is unable to provide a compelling alternative narrative to the BJP's popular blend of Hindu nationalism and development. Also, as Asim Ali, a political scientist, says, this narrative enjoys the support of a large section of the media, business and society. "Issues only come to the fore when they have widespread social support," he says.

There's no lack of issues for the Opposition to rally around. They have highlighted Modi's "failure" to tackle the acute jobs crisis. They have condemned the BJP's anti-Muslim rhetoric, and its alleged attacks on media and think-tanks and the harassment of political rivals using government agencies. They have united in protest in defence of more than 140 Opposition MPs who were suspended for disrupting proceedings in parliament in December.

Yet, as Verniers says, there appears to be no "ideological binding force" uniting the Opposition, particularly in relation to the robust Hindu nationalism promoted by Modi and BJP.

To be true, cobbling together an alliance to take on a well-oiled and amply resourced BJP led by a hugely popular leader is easier said than done. It took decades for the fragmented Opposition to come together and defeat the dominant Congress, which ruled India uninterruptedly for 30 years from independence to 1977.

So is the INDIA alliance doomed? "The alliance is in troubled waters, but they can still find ways to contest together," says Verma. The elections hinged on the Congress' performance in over 250 seats in the BJP stronghold of northern and western India, rather than on the outcomes of regional allies in their respective states, he argues.

—BBC News

SALAR ساڈا

Decoding cold wave conditions in North India

The ongoing cold wave conditions observed over North India result from the intrusion of cold and dry air from the Siberian high, according to a study by researchers at IISER Mohali.

The Siberian High is a massive collection of cold dry air that accumulates in the northeastern part of Eurasia from November until February.

The study, published in the journal Weather and Climate Extremes, sheds light on the underlying causes and alarming trends behind the frigid conditions.

The research, led by Professor Raju Attada from Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER Mohali), unveils crucial insights into the factors driving extreme winter temperatures.

A cold wave event is identified from the normalised minimum temperature anomaly, when the standard deviation is less than minus 1 for four or more consecutive days. A severe cold wave event is identified from the normalised minimum temperature anomaly, when the standard deviation is less than minus 2 for four or more consecutive days.

Delhi and other northern parts experienced severe cold on Wednesday as many areas of the region received rainfall and snow. In Delhi, the maximum temperature was 18.6 degrees Celsius, four notches below the season's average, and minimum stood at 7.3 degrees Celsius, a notch below the normal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The study attributed the ongoing cold wave to the intrusion of cold and dry air from the Siberian high, intensified by the persistence of high-latitude weather systems known as 'Atmospheric blocking.' This atmospheric phenomenon leads to the buildup of cold air, causing extreme cold conditions in northern India, the researchers said.

The research identified 509 cold wave days, including 45 days of severe cold wave events **PHOTO: PTI**

The team, including KS Athira at IISER Mohali and V Brahmanada Rao from the National Institute for Space Research, Brazil, also noted that the winter atmospheric blocking this year has intensified cold waves and prolonged their persistence from the end of December to January.

The study, spanning the years 1982-2020, however, identified a reduction in the number, duration, and intensity of cold wave events during this period.

This decline is linked to rising winter minimum temperatures due to global warming and a decreasing number of western disturbances (WDs), the researchers said.

Western disturbances are storms that originate in the Caspian or Mediterranean Sea, and bring non-monsoonal rainfall to northwest India.

The researchers employed a meticulous methodology to identify cold wave events, considering the normalised minimum temperature anomaly and standard deviations.

The research identified 509 cold wave days, including 45 days of severe cold wave events. The researchers noted that the implications of cold waves extend beyond human health, impacting agriculture, livestock, and causing disruptions to transportation.

The risk of hypothermia and frostbite, particularly for vulnerable groups, emphasises the urgency for clear policies at various administrative levels, they said.

Attada stressed the need for prioritising actions to save human lives during cold waves.

"Understanding the synoptic features and the dynamics behind the formation of cold waves is important for the accurate prediction of cold wave events," he added

—PTI

The study attributed the ongoing cold wave to the intrusion of cold and dry air from the Siberian high, intensified by the persistence of high-latitude weather systems **PHOTO: PTI**

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Myanmar: How much longer can the junta stay in power?

Myanmar has been in chaos ever since General Min Aung Hlaing and his military forces overthrew the democratically elected government on 1 February, 2021.

On the eve of the coup anniversary, the junta extended by six months the state of emergency it declared on February 1, 2021.Three years after seizing control, Myanmar's junta is still struggling to control the country.

How has the coup changed Myanmar?

Over 4,400 people have been killed, and over 25,000 people arrested since the military seized power, according to rights groups.

Although life in urban areas appears to be somewhat normal, the rest of Myanmar is in disorder, according to Aung Thu Nyein, a political analyst from Myanmar.

"Because of instability and difficult to predict what will happen next, a lot of businesses are stopping their activities," he said.

The United Nations said the number of displaced people in Myanmar since the coup has exceeded two million. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called Thursday for an end to violence in Myanmar and a return to democracy.

Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, called for the restoration of civilian rule, accountability of the military, and the release of political prisoners.

"Amid all the crises around the world, it is important no-one is forgotten. The people of Myanmar have been suffering for too long," he said in an online statement.

Is a peaceful solution possible?

Earlier this week, the military government extended Myanmar's state of emergency again by another six months, a regular occurrence since the coup.

But not enough has been done, either politically or diplomatically to stop the war, said Sai Latt, a political analyst covering Myanmar's revolutionary movements and region relations.

Diplomatic efforts by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to resolve the conflict have proved ineffective, with little progress being made since the 10-member bloc agreed on a five-point peace plan — which Myanmar signed up to but has failed to implement.

"He urged political parties to form people's militia for community security and defense instead of asking them to help find political solutions — an indication that a peaceful political solution is not on his agenda," Sai said.

"Resistance groups are committed to continue the fighting until SAC is removed, as a result, the conflict will continue in 2024 and beyond," added Sai, referring to the Myanmar military government, which calls itself the State Administration Council (SAC).

The SAC has often resorted to using devastating air strikes and scorch earth tactics to pummel resistance groups.

Opposition forces making gains

But the tide has turned somewhat in recent months.Myanmar's Opposition forces have made significant inroads, capturing territory in the country's northern Shan state in a three-pronged united brotherhood alliance, leaving the junta reeling.

The sweeping "Operation 1027" offensive over the span of three months saw dozens of townships and hundreds of junta-held military bases captured.

The logo of the ethnic rebel group Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) on a member's uniformThe logo of the ethnic rebel group Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) on a member's uniform

The ethnic group alliance captured Laukkai, the capital of the Kokang Self-Administered Zone, which runs along the Myanmar-China border.This caught the attention of China because of the potential for trade disruptions and an influx of refugees, prompting Beijing to try again to be a mediator, where twice before it had failed.

Delayed elections

Beijing's Foreign Ministry said an immediate ceasefire between alliance and junta representatives had been agreed with all parties after talks were held in China.But only days later, reports of junta forces firing on the alliance saw the ethnic groups retaliate.

"The ceasefire in Shan State has already been broken by both sides in multiple locations. If and when the Brotherhood alliance decide it's in their interest to go back on the offensive this so-called ceasefire is unlikely to deter them," Davis said. The offensive has spread to other Myanmar regions, with the Arakan Army, an ethnic armed group, now controlling almost all the northern Rakhine state.

Aung Thu Nyein said the losses have been "humiliating" for the military and claims there's internal unrest in the military ranks.

"I think the country is leading to a kind of state failure," Aung said. "The military is with this humiliating defeat and at the same time the Opposition are gaining momentum."The analyst suggested that Min Aung Hlaing strategy could be to hold on to power until the junta holds long-promised elections next year.

"I think in 2024, the conflict will intensify. But now the military has been preparing to hold elections as a way out in 2025," Aung said.

"I think it's going to be strategy for Min Aung Hlaing. But I think the various kinds of crises — politics, military and economic social crisis are intensifying. And now a lot of people are expecting change," he added.

"A lot of people from the military business sectors and from other groups, are talking about changes in the leaderships.

—DW News

Over 4,400 have been killed, and over 25,000 were arrested since the military seized power, according to rights groups **PHOTO: PTI**

PHOTO: AP

7 detained in Turkey for selling data to Mossad

ISTANBUL, 2 FEB

Turkey's state-run news agency says police have arrested seven people on suspicion of selling information to the Israeli intelligence service Mossad. The suspects, who allegedly passed details to Mossad via private detectives, were detained in a joint operation with Turkey's National Intelligence Organization on Friday. The Anadolu news agency says police anti-terror and intelligence branch officers carried out raids in Istanbul and the west coast city of Izmir. Last month, 34 people were detained on suspicion of planning to carry out activities that included reconnaissance and "pursuing, assaulting and kidnapping" foreign nationals living in Turkey on Israel's behalf. *—AP*

Malaysia halves ex-PM's term for corruption

KUALA LUMPUR, 2 FEB

Malaysia's Pardons Board said Friday it has reduced ex-Prime Minister Najib Razak's 12-year jail sentence by half and sharply cut the fine imposed after his corruption conviction.The board said it approved the reduction at a meeting on Monday chaired by the country's then-king, Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, who is from Najib's home state of Pahang, to consider Najib's application for a royal pardon. Malaysia has a unique rotating monarchy system, and a new king was sworn in on Wednesday. With the sentence commuted, Najib will be freed by 23 August, 2028, the board said. It said it also decided to cut Najib's USD 44.5 million fine to USD 10.6 million. *—AP*

Several dead as plane crashes in Florida home park

CLEARWATER, 2 FEB

A small plane crashed at a Florida mobile home park on Thursday, killing several people aboard the plane and in one home, fire officials said. The pilot of the single-engine Beechcraft Bonanza V35 reported an engine failure shortly before the aircraft went down at about 7 pm, the Federal Aviation Administration reported. It crashed in the Bayside Waters mobile home park in Clearwater, hitting one home and leaving at least three homes with fire damage, although the flames were quickly doused, Clearwater Fire Chief Scott Ehlers said at a news conference. Ehlers didn't give the exact number of people killed, saying only that several people aboard the plane and in a home died. The FAA said it wasn't clear how many people were on the plane.*—AP*

Norway expects landslides after worst storm ever

COPENHAGEN, 2 FEB

Norwegian authorities issued several warnings for landslides and avalanches in southern Norway Friday as bad weather continued to hammer the Scandinavian country. In the northern part of the country, officials said roads might be closed at short notice. Flights to and from the airport in Tromsoe, a city in the Arctic, resumed Friday after some 200 passengers had to sleep there because of Norway's most powerful storm since 1992. The Norwegian Meteorological Institute said strong winds were still blowing over northern Norway and warned that rain was expected in the southern part of the country with up to 100 milimeters (4 inches) within 24 hours. The Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate issued its highest avalanche warnings for most of southern and central Norway for the coming days. The storm Ingunn brought gusts of up to 180km per hour in some places.*—AP*

N Korea tests more missiles as Kim calls for war readiness

The launches are the North's fourth round of cruise missile tests

SEOUL, 2 FEB

North Korean on Friday extended a provocative run in weapons tests by firing cruise missiles into the sea, as leader Kim Jong Un called for his military to step up war preparations while touring a shipyard.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the US and South Korean militaries were analysing the North Korean launches into its western sea. It said the South's military detected multiple missiles but it did not immediately provide a specific number or an assessment of their flight characteristics.

The launches, which were the North's fourth round of cruise missile tests in 2024, came hours after state media reported that Kim reiterated his focus on strengthening his naval forces as he inspected unspecified naval projects at a shipyard in Nampho, on the west coast.

Kim in recent months has emphasised his effort to build a nuclear-armed navy to counter what he portrays as growing external threats posed by the United States, South Korea and Japan, which have stepped up their military cooperation to cope with Kim's nuclear weapons and missile program.

The launches came hours after state media reported that Kim reiterated his focus on strengthening his naval forces *PHOTO: AP*

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency did not specify when Kim visited Nampho. It paraphrased Kim as saying that the strengthening of his naval force "presents itself as the most important issue in reliably defending the maritime sovereignty of the country and stepping up the war preparations."

KCNA did not specify the types of warships being built in Nampho, but said they were related to a five-year military development plan set during a ruling party congress in early 2021. During those meetings, Kim revealed an extensive wish list of advanced military assets, which included nuclear-powered submarines and nuclear missiles that can be launched from underwater.

During the inspection, Kim was briefed on the progress of his naval projects and remaining technological challenges and ordered workers to "unconditionally" complete the efforts within the timeframe of the plan that runs through 2025, KCNA said. *—AP*

US nod to strike on Iranian targets in Syria

WASHINGTON, 2 FEB

The US has approved plans for a series of strikes on Iranian targets in Syria and Iraq, officials have told the BBC's US partner CBS News.

The strikes will take place over a number of days, officials said, and weather conditions will likely dictate when they are launched.

It comes after a drone attack killed three US soldiers in Jordan, close to the Syrian border, on Sunday.

The US blamed an Iranian-backed militia group for that attack.

That group, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, is believed to contain multiple militias that have been armed, funded and trained by Iran's Revolutionary Guards force. It has said it was responsible for Sunday's strike.

Iran, meanwhile, has denied any role in the attack which injured 41 other US troops at the military base, known as Tower 22.

- President Joe Biden has been under mounting pressure from Republican lawmakers, including some of Washington's most hawkish voices on Iran, to strike targets on Iranian soil.

US officials have said that US intelligence believes that the drone used to attack the facility was manufactured by Iran - and is similar to the drones Iran has been sending to Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

President Joe Biden has been under mounting pressure from Republican lawmakers, including some of Washington's most hawkish voices on Iran, to strike targets on Iranian soil.

The Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen, for example, have attacked ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, prompting strikes from the US and its allies. *—BBC News*

AHEAD OF POLLS

10 bomb attacks rock Pakistan's Balochistan

The offices of deputy commissioners in Dhadar and Panjgur were also targeted with hand grenades *PHOTO: ANI*

ISLAMABAD, 2 FEB

As authorities in Pakistan scrambled to keep peace ahead of next week's general elections, the country's restive Balochistan province was rattled with 10 bomb and grenade attacks on Thursday. This resulted in the death of one person.

Several police stations and deputy commissioners' offices were targeted in the attacks in which six people, including a police officer and a jail warden, were injured, the Dawn newspaper reported.

Pakistan will go to polls on 8 February.

A bomb, placed along a footpath on the China-Pakistan Economic Cooperation (CPEC) road in the Spinny area of Quetta, went off, killing a passerby The intensity of the blast rocked several areas of the provincial capital. The police cordoned off the area and shifted the body to Civil Hospital. The deceased is as an 84-year-old man.

Around 8kg of explosive was used in the improvised explosive device.

The target of the bomb was unknown as there was no election campaign-related event scheduled within the vicinity and security was already on high alert due to the upcoming elections. In another attack near Quetta's outskirts, an assistant sub-inspector Ghulam Raza, was injured.

Unknown attackers hurled a hand grenade at the Shalkot police station, which exploded in the courtyard. The attack damaged the station's building and some vehicles in the parking area.

In Mastung, the central prison was attacked by hand grenades, which exploded inside the jail, resulting in damage to the building. The jail warden was injured in the attack.

In the attacks in Quetta, Khuzdar and Turbat, the offices of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) and National Party, and a joint office of Balochistan National Party Mengal (BNP-M) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) were targeted with grenades.

The offices of deputy commissioners in Dhadar and Panjgur were also targeted with hand grenades. *—PTI*

100 Rohingyas flee Malaysia holding camp

KUALA LUMPUR, 2 FEB

More than 100 Rohingya immigrants have escaped from a detention centre in Malaysia after a protest, with one confirmed killed in a road accident, officials said Friday.

This was the second time in two years that such a breakout occurred. In 2022, 528 Rohingya refugees staged a protest and escaped from detention in northern Penang state. Six were killed while trying to cross a highway, and most of the others were rearrested.

Immigration Department Director-General Ruslin Jusoh said in a statement that 131 detainees escaped from a center in Perak state late Thursday. He said one of the detainees was killed in a road accident. Nearly 400 personnel were deployed to hunt them down, he added, without giving details on what sparked the breakout.

District police Chief Mohamad Naim Asnawi was quoted by national Bernama news agency as saying that the immigrants escaped from the men's block after a riot broke out at the center. The suspects included 115 Rohingya and 16 Myanmar nationals, all males, he said.

Malaysia, which has a dominant Muslim population, is a preferred destination for Muslim Rohingya fleeing from Buddhist-majority Myanmar or those seeking to escape misery in refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Malaysia doesn't grant refugee status, but it houses about 180,000 refugees. *—AP*

3 killed, 270 injured in Kenyan gas blast

NAIROBI, 2 FEB

A vehicle loaded with gas exploded and set off an inferno that burned homes and warehouses in Kenya's capital early Friday, killing at least three people and injuring more than 270, with the death toll expected to rise.

Many residents were likely inside their homes when the fire reached their houses late in the night in the Mradi area of the Nairobi neighborhood of Embakasi, government spokesman Isaac Mwaura said.

The truck explosion ignited a huge fireball, and a flying gas cylinder set off a fire that burned down the Oriental Godown, a warehouse that deals with garments and textiles, Mwaura said. Several other vehicles and businesses were damaged by the inferno that started on Thursday. At the scene after daybreak, several houses and shops were burned out. The shell of the vehicle believed to have started the explosion was lying on its side. The roof of a four-story residential building about 200m from the scene of the explosion was broken by a flying gas cylinder. *—AP*

NO CASUALTY

Canada probes shooting at Nijjar friend's home

OTTAWA, 2 FEB

Canadian Police have said they are investigating an overnight shooting at a South Surrey home that local community members say belongs to a friend of slain Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

Surrey Royal Canadian Mounted Police say they first responded to reports of gunshots just after 1.20 am Pacific Time on Thursday at a home located near the 2,800 block of 154 Street.

A spokesperson for the British Columbia Gurdwaras Council said the home belongs to Simranjeet Singh, who was a friend of Nijjar whose killing in Surrey in June led to a diplomatic row between India and Canada.

Corporal Sarbjit Sangha said officers stayed in the area and spoke to neighbours and witnesses, and are currently reviewing CCTV footage to find out more about Thursday's shooting. No one was injured.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in September alleged a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in Nijjar's killing *PHOTO: AP*

Reportedly, a car that had been heavily damaged by gunfire was found in the area, along with multiple bullet holes in the house itself.

Sangha did not confirm how many shots were fired into the house and said police believe the incident was isolated in nature.

Moninder Singh, the spokesperson for the BC Gurdwaras Council, said community members believe homeowner Simranjeet Singh's connection with Nijjar might have played a part in the shooting.

The ties between India and Canada came under severe strain after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in September alleged a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in Nijjar's killing in Surrey in June. India, however, rejected the charges by Canada, deeming them as "absurd and motivated" and said the country has a strong commitment to the rule of law. *—PTI*

Ex-CIA man gets 40yrs jail for leaking secrets

WASHINGTON, 2 FEB

A former CIA officer has been sentenced to 40 years in prison for leaking a trove of classified hacking tools to whistle-blowing platform Wikileaks.

Joshua Schulte was also found guilty of possessing child abuse images.

Prosecutors have accused him of leaking the CIA's "Vault 7" tools, which allow intelligence officers to hack smartphones and use them as listening devices.

They said the leak is one of the most "brazen" in US history.

Schulte, 35, shared 8,761 documents to Wikileaks in 2017, amounting to the largest data breach in the history of the CIA. He denied the allegations, but was convicted on the various counts at three separate federal trials in New York in 2020, 2022, and 2023.

On Thursday, he was sentenced for charges of espionage, computer hacking, contempt of court, making false statements to the FBI and possession of child abuse images.

According to evidence shared at the trial, Schulte was employed as a software developer in the Center for Cyber Intelligence, which conducts cyber espionage against terrorist organisations and foreign governments.

Prosecutors said that in 2016 that he transmitted the stolen information to Wikileaks and then lied to FBI agents about his role in the leak. *—BBC News*

Trump wins final delegate out of New Hampshire

WASHINGTON, 2 FEB

Former President Donald Trump has won the last remaining unresolved delegate from New Hampshire, giving him a 13-9 delegate advantage in the Granite State over former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley.

The Associated Press allocated the final delegate based on the latest vote results from the 23 January primary in accordance with the state's unusual rules regarding the allocation of Republican delegates.

Unlike in the Democratic presidential primaries, where all states follow a mostly uniform delegate allocation procedure, Republican delegate rules vary state by state. In New Hampshire, 22 Republican delegates are awarded to candidates in proportion to statewide primary results. For example, a candidate who receives 50 per cent of the primary vote will receive 50per cent of the delegates at stake, or in this case, 11 delegates. The rules also state that a candidate must receive at least 10 per cent of the primary vote to qualify for any delegates. *—AP*

An image from a new series of videos and digital spots from Nikki Haley's campaign, which target President Biden and former President Trump over their age and cognitive abilities *PHOTO: X*

ZUCK GETS RICHER AFTER APOLOGY

Mark Zuckerberg wins on Wall Street after Washington hit

WASHINGTON, 2 FEB

Mark Zuckerberg's Meta had a bad day in Washington this week. But on Wall Street, it took a victory lap. The social media firm updated investors with a slew of good news: quarterly profits that tripled year-on-year to more than $14bn, a surge in users, lower costs and higher ad sales.

Even its much ridiculed, money-losing virtual reality unit hit a milestone, generating $1bn in revenue.

Meta's performance was the most head-spinning, coming just a day after it faced blistering critique in Washington, where senators told Zuckerberg that his product was "killing people" and he was pushed to apologise to families of victims of child sexual exploitation.

Senators told Zuckerberg that his product was "killing people" and he was pushed to apologise *PHOTO: AP*

Speaking to analysts on Thursday, Meta acknowledged that it was facing regulatory challenges that could "significantly" affect its business.

The company, owner of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, also pledged to keep the money flowing, saying it was in a strong financial position, and could invest in the business while still making plans for such payments on a quarterly basis "going forward".

Shares in the company, already at record highs, surged more than 12 percent in after-hours trade.

Analysts said the decision to offer a dividend was a sign of maturity, as Facebook approaches its 20th birthday.

It confirmed the shift in investor sentiment from 2022, when shares in the company had swooned and a high-profile investor wrote a public letter to Zuckerberg that the company had "drifted into the land of excess — too many people, too many ideas, too little urgency" and "needed to get its "mojo back"

Elsewhere in big tech, business was also good.

But it spent little time on the topic.

And for now, whatever the product may be doing, there is little doubt that people, and advertisers, are sticking with it.

Meta said nearly 3.2 billion people were active on one of its platforms daily in December, up 8 per cent year-on-year. *—BBC News*

MARK ZUCKERBERG'S LONG HISTORY OF APOLOGIES

Blinded By Beacon

In 2007, Facebook launched Beacon, to track purchases and activities on other sites, and this was published on friends' newsfeeds without permission. Zuckerberg admitted to mistakes and Beacon was discontinued

Mocking Facebook's early users

Zuckerberg mocked 4,000 students who joined Facebook, calling them "dumb" and bragged about the personal information he collected in a text messages to his friend. The messages were leaked in 2010 for which he apologised

VR tour of a disaster zone

In 2017, Zuckerberg and did a live VR tour of Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. It drew complaints, and Zuckerberg apologised for any offense caused

Cambridge analytica

In 2018, Facebook was accused of capturing data from 87M users and forwarded it to a UK political data-mining firm Cambridge Analytica that had ties to Donald Trump's political strategist. It was used to target voters during 2016 US presidential campaign that resulted in Trump's election. Zuckerberg again was sorry

Investors have no voting rights on CEO change: BYJU'S

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Edtech major BYJU'S, on Friday said investors have no voting rights on the CEO or management change as per the shareholder's agreement.

At least six BYJU's investors have called for an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) to address issues at the edtech major and oust founders from having control over the firm.

The investors led by Dutch investment firm Prosus in the EGM notice requested the resolution of the outstanding governance, financial mismanagement and compliance issues and the reconstitution of the Board of Directors.

"The resolutions being put forward for the EGM to consider include a request for the resolution of outstanding governance, financial mismanagement and compliance issues, the reconstitution of the Board of Directors so that it is no longer controlled by the founders of T&L and a change in leadership of the Company," a recent notice to shareholders by the group of investors said.

According to a source, who did not wish to be identified, the notice has been backed by General

Byju Raveendran **PHOTO: PTI**

Atlantic, Peak XV, Sofina, Chan Zuckerberg, Owl, and Sands, who jointly account for around 30 per cent stake in BYJU's.

As per the notice, a consortium of BYJU'S shareholders had in July and December requested the board of directors for the meeting but it was disregarded.

BYJU'S said it will continue with the proposed USD 200 million rights issue after receiving encouraging responses from multiple investors.

"The company is gladdened by the support received by a wide section of its shareholders. The criticality of the rights issue has been shared with all shareholders, with capital being pivotal for a successful turnaround. Unfortunately, the company and our employees are paying the price for a stand-off triggered by some investors," BYJU'S said.

The edtech firm said its leadership has updated the working group on all crucial matters, including ongoing business restructuring, financial position, and audits.BYJU'S said the company has not had any external investor funding for nearly two years apart from the founder infusing over USD 1 billion and this is a reason for it launching a rights issue as a quick and equitable way to raise money. *—PTI*

Rupee rises 7 paise to close at 82.91 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 2 FEB

The rupee appreciated 7 paise to close at 82.91 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, supported by a firm trend in domestic equities and a weak greenback against major currencies overseas amid rising appetite for riskier assets.

The interim Budget 2024-25, especially the focus on fiscal prudence, left a positive impact on the domestic currency, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.91 against the greenback. The unit hit an intraday high of 82.82 and a low of 82.93.The local unit finally settled at 82.91 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 7 paise from its previous close of 82.98.Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday hiked capital expenditure by 11 per cent for the next fiscal to sustain a world-beating economic growth rate while trimming the deficit in a reform-oriented interim budget.*—PTI*

Gold appreciates by ₹200; silver rallies ₹400

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Gold prices appreciated Rs 200 to Rs 63,650 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid strong cues in global markets, according to HDFC Securities.The precious metal had closed at Rs 63,450 per 10 grams in the previous trade.Silver also rallied Rs 400 to Rs 76,500 per kilogram, while it had ended at Rs 76,100 per kg in the previous close."Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,650 per 10 grams, up Rs 200," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.In international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading higher at USD 2,054 per ounce, up USD 10 from the previous close.Traders are looking for US non-farm payrolls data to be released on Friday, which could offer more cues on the macro front for the US Fed's monetary policy outlook, Gandhi added.Also, silver was quoting with gains at USD 23.15 per ounce *—PTI*

Coal India fuel supply rises by 5% in Apr-Jan FY24

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

State-owned Coal India Ltd on Friday said that it supplied 509 million tonnes of coal to thermal power plants in the April-January period of this fiscal, registering a rise of 4.7 per cent. Coal India supplied 486 million tonnes (MT) of dry fuel to coal-fired power plants in the year-ago period."Staying ahead of the projected demand since the beginning of the fiscal, CIL's supplies to coal-fired plants raced to 509 MT till January," the PSU said in a statement. CIL's increased supplies forming the bulk, ensured stock at domestic coal based power plants hitting an all-time high of 36.2 MT in January, eclipsing the previous high of 34.5 MTs recorded four years ago same month *—PTI*

'Avg monthly GST collections to grow 11% in FY25'

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Government expects average monthly GST collections to touch about Rs 1.85 lakh crore in the next fiscal, up from about Rs 1.66 lakh crore this year, Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra said on Friday.

Malhotra also said the incorporation date for startups to avail of tax benefits for three years out of 10 have been extended by a year till 31 March, 2025.

He also said the customs duty cut in mobile spare parts and components to 10 per cent is intended to simplify tax structure, reduce classification disputes and should further spur investment in mobile manufacturing. The monthly GST collection has crossed Rs 1.70 lakh crore in three months this fiscal, taking the average monthly mop-up to Rs 1.67 lakh crore in current fiscal.In the next fiscal, the Budget has estimated GST collections at Rs 10.68 lakh crore, a 11.6 per cent growth over Rs 9.57 lakh crore mop-up in 2023-24. *—PTI*

RBI INTERVENTION

Paytm CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma **PHOTO: PTI**

Paytm will work beyond 29 Feb as usual: CEO

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

- The company sees the RBI order to have an impact of Rs 300-500 crore on its annual operational profit

Digital payments and services app Paytm is working and will continue to work as usual even after 29 February, its CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma said on Friday.

The founder and CEO of One97 Communications Ltd (OCL), which owns Paytm brand, on social media platform X said the company is committed to serving the nation in full compliance.

"To every Paytmer, Your favourite app is working, will keep working beyond 29 February as usual," Sharma said.

RBI has barred Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) from accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer account, prepaid instruments, wallets, and FASTags, among others after 29 February, 2024.

OCL holds a 49 per cent stake in PPBL but classifies it as an associate of the company and not as a subsidiary.

Paytm top management during an earning call on Thursday said they are working on a migration plan for PPBL, wallet, FASTag etc users with other banks.

The company sees the RBI order to have an impact of Rs 300-500 crore on its annual operational profit as its customers will not be able to add money to their wallets, FASTag etc.

Separately, the company informed that its offline merchants network offering and device business like Paytm Soundbox, EDC, QR are not impacted by the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) direction to its associate bank.

—PTI

Reducing unclaimed assets focus of SEBI

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Capital markets regulator SEBI on Friday proposed revamping the nominations framework in a bid to reduce unclaimed assets in the securities market as well as smoothen the process for claiming the assets by surviving successors of the deceased investors.

In its consultation paper, SEBI proposed revisions to nomination facilities for securities such as shares, bonds, units of Real Estate Investment Trusts, Infrastructure Investment Trusts, Alternative Investment Funds and other securities held in dematerialized form and for units of mutual fund schemes that are expressed in a statement of account.

SEBI noted that the primary factors contributing to the increase in unclaimed assets are incomplete nominations or unavailability of nominations for financial assets in the securities markets. *—PTI*

Nifty marks record high, closes above 21,800

Nifty went up by 156.35 points or 0.72% to 21,853.80

MUMBAI, 2 FEB

Benchmark equity indices bounced back sharply on Friday, with the Nifty hitting its lifetime peak in intra-day trade, tracking a rally in global markets along with buying in Reliance Industries, Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 440.33 points or 0.61 per cent to settle at 72,085.63. During the day, it jumped 1,444.1 points or 2 per cent to 73,089.40.

The Nifty went up by 156.35 points or 0.72 per cent to 21,853.80. During the day, the benchmark soared 429.35 points or 1.97 per cent to reach its lifetime peak of 22,126.80.

Among the Sensex firms, Power Grid, NTPC, Tata Steel, Tata Consultancy Services, JSW Steel, Wipro, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Reliance Industries and Bajaj Finance were the major gainers.

Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, were among the laggards **PHOTO: PTI**

Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Larsen & Toubro and ITC were among the laggards.

"A conservative interim budget had no slowdown effect on the market, which continued to grow on the pre-election rally. The drastic fall in the fiscal deficit target is leading to a reduction in bond yields, which will lead to lowering of corporate borrowing costs, increasing incentives to step up investment," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge jumped 0.80 per cent and smallcap index climbed 0.49 per cent.

Among the indices, oil & gas jumped 4.22 per cent, energy went up by 3.44 per cent, metal (2.95 per cent), services (2.22 per cent), utilities (2.18 per cent), IT (2.17 per cent) and power (1.81 per cent).Financial Services, FMCG, telecommunication and bankex were the laggards.

On the weekly basis, the BSE benchmark jumped 1,384.96 points or 1.95 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 501.2 points or 2.34 per cent.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled in the positive territory while Shanghai and Hong Kong ended in the red.

The BSE benchmark declined 106.81 points or 0.15 per cent to settle at 71,645.30 on the Budget day on Thursday. The Nifty dipped 28.25 points or 0.13 per cent to 21,697.45. *—PTI*

GOVT TO SELL BHARAT RICE AT ₹29/KG IN RETAIL

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Government on Friday said it will sell 'Bharat Rice' in the retail market at Rs 29 per kg from next week to give relief to the common man and has directed traders to disclose rice stock, as part of its efforts to control prices.

In a press conference, Union Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra said retail and wholesale prices of rice have increased by around 15 per cent in the last one year despite restrictions on exports of various varieties.

To control prices, he said the government has decided to sell subsidised 'Bharat Rice' at Rs 29 per kg in the retail market through two cooperatives the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED) and National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India Ltd (NCCF) as well as retail chain Kendriya Bhandar.

E-commerce platforms will also sell Bharat Rice.

He said Bharat Rice will be available in the market from next week in 5kg and 10kg packs. *—PTI*

Fitch Ratings forecasts FY25 fiscal deficit at 5.4%

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Fitch Ratings on Friday forecasted FY25 fiscal deficit at 5.4%. It said that the slightly faster pace of fiscal deficit reduction does not significantly change India's sovereign credit profile but the government's emphasis on deficit reduction will help to stabilise the debt-to-GDP ratio over the medium term.

"Our current forecast is for the deficit to reach 5.4 per cent of GDP in FY25, above the budget target due to more conservative revenue forecasts in the next year. But the government has shown a recent record of achieving fiscal targets, which gives credibility for it to reach the 5.1 per cent target," Fitch Ratings Director, Sovereign Ratings, Jeremy Zook said.

He said that next five years, India's government debt-to-GDP ratio would be stable at just above 80 per cent of GDP. *—PTI*

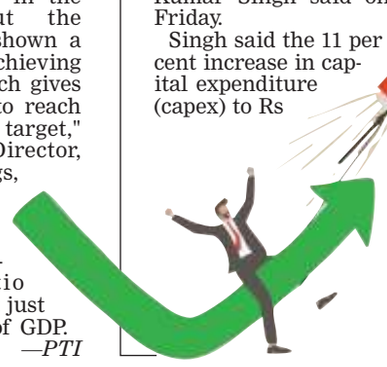
Boosting startups will help economy: DPIIT

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Announcements in the interim Budget 2024-25 with regard to deep-tech and startups will significantly help boost India's innovation-led economy, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh said on Friday.

Singh said the 11 per cent increase in capital expenditure (capex) to Rs 11.11 lakh crore for the next financial year, and the provision to provide Rs 75,000 crore as interest-free loan for 50 years to support reforms by states, will help further improve the country's logistics efficiency, connectivity and cut down the logistics cost.

Provisions related to research and development "hopefully trigger some greater private sector investments in R&D. Announcement of a new scheme for strengthening deep-tech technologies is good for startups also... It will give a boost to India's increasingly becoming an innovation led economy," Singh said. *—PTI*



Budget will help achieve 4.5% fiscal deficit target of FY26: NITI VC Bery

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

PHOTO:PTI

NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Suman Bery on Friday described Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's pre-election budget as 'fiscally conservative' and exuded confidence that the government will achieve the fiscal deficit target of 4.5 per cent of GDP by 2025-26.

Sitharaman on Thursday announced a Rs 11.11 lakh crore spending on infrastructure and vowed to continue reforms as she resisted resorting to populist measures in the Modi government's last budget before general elections, instead choosing to stay on the path of cutting deficit while bolstering measures for focus groups.

"I think the interim budget is fiscally conservative, actually opens new ground and provides indications of what might figure in the actual major budget, which will be presented in July," he said.

Bery further said the fiscal outcome of this year's budget is better than what was anticipated.

"We are going to achieve 4.5 per fiscal deficit target for 2025-26 as it is important, both in substance and for signal," he added. Continuing on the fiscally prudent path, the Modi government in the interim budget refrained from announcing populist measures, which will help it trim the fiscal deficit to 5.1 per cent of the GDP next fiscal and 4.5 per cent in FY26.

According to Bery, there are several indications that private investment will revive.

Replying to a question on capital expenditure outlay for the next fiscal year, he noted that the thrust on capex was because the economy was paralyzed at the time of COVID pandemic.

"The logic is that in the short term, the return in terms of multiplier, connected with capex is much greater than revenue expenditure," Bery said.

Asked how the measures announced in the budget will help in creating more jobs, he said,"the issue is not jobs, the issue is good jobs".Asserting that unemployment has been coming down, he said India has problems of matching employees to jobs.

To a question on farm distress, Bery said India's agricultural productivity is much lower than what it should be. *—PTI*

Blackstone-backed Aadhar Housing files ₹5K cr IPO

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd, which is backed by private equity major Blackstone, has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise Rs 5,000 crore through an Initial Public Offering (IPO).

The IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 1,000 crore and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of Rs 4,000 crore by promoter BCP Topco VII Pte Ltd, an affiliate of Blackstone Group Inc, according to the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) filed on Wednesday.

Currently, BCP Topco holds a 98.72 per cent stake in Aadhar Housing Finance.It proposes to utilise the proceeds from the fresh issue to the tune of Rs 750 crore for meeting future capital requirements towards onward lending and a portion will also be used for general corporate purposes.It offers a range of mortgage-related loan products, including loans for residential property purchase and construction; and extension loans; and loans for commercial property construction and acquisition.It has a network of 471 branches, including 91 sales offices, as of September 30, 2023.Earlier, it filed draft papers with Sebi to raise Rs 7,300 crore through an initial share sale. It had received the regulator's nod to float the public issue in May 2022, however, it did not go ahead with the launch. *—PTI*

E-biometrics to speed up immigration

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

To expedite immigration and security check processes at airports, authorities will look at possible changes in the interior design of airports, cross utilisation of X-ray machines at domestic and international terminals as well as use of new technologies, including e-biometrics.

At an advisory committee meeting chaired by Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Friday, various plans were discussed to speed up immigration and security check processes for international passengers.

"We are currently discussing the design models to speed up immigration & security for international travellers. New technologies such as e-biometrics are also on the anvil and are currently being tested. These will be key in our vision for international aviation hubs in India," Scindia said in a post on Discussions also come at a time when efforts are being made to ease congestion at major airports, including at Delhi, during peak travel periods.*—PTI*

SELLING LIKE HOT CAKES

Apple India Dec 2023 qtr revenue hits record high

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

iPhone maker Apple's revenue grew in double-digits and hit a new record in December 2023 quarter on strong iPhone sales, a top official of the company said on Friday.

"India grew in revenue terms, grew strong double-digits in the December quarter and hit a revenue record," Apple CEO Tim Cook said during Apple's earnings call.

Apple posted quarterly revenue of USD 119.6 billion, up 2 per cent year-over-year, and its installed base of active devices has now surpassed 2.2 billion, reaching an all-time high across all products and geographic segments.

The company's revenue from iPhone grew by about 6 per cent to USD 69.7 billion in the reported quarter, from USD 65.77 billion.

Company saw all-time high revenues in other emerging markets as well including Malaysia, Mexico, the Philippines, Poland and Turkey, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia etc, Cook added.

According to market research firm Counterpoint Research, Apple led the

Tim Cook **PHOTO:PTI**

India market with highest revenue in 2023 for the first time, while Samsung topped the chart in terms of volume sales.

The firm in its recent report said Apple surpassed the 10-million-unit mark in shipments and captured the top position in revenue in a calendar year for the first time.

Wearable, home and accessories segment of Apple declined by close to 11 per cent to USD 11.95 billion in the reported quarter, from USD 13.48 billion in the year-ago period.

The services revenue of Apple increased by 11.3 per cent to USD 23.11 billion in the December 2023 quarter, from USD 20.76 billion a year ago.

For the year ended 30 September, 2023, Apple net income declined by 2.8 per cent to USD 96.99 billion, from USD 99.8 billion in the year-ago period.

The annual revenue of the iPhone maker also declined by 2.8 per cent to 383.28 billion in the fiscal year ended 30 September, 2023 from USD 394.32 billion in FY 2022.

The annual iPhone sales declined by 2.3 per cent to USD 200.5 billion during the reported year, from USD 205.48 billion in previous fiscal.

The services revenue of Apple increased by 9 per cent to USD 85.2 billion in FY'23, from USD 78.12 billion in FY'22. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Karnataka beat AP by 9 wickets to clinch Nagesh Trophy

NAGPUR, 2 FEB

Karnataka on Friday lifted the Nagesh Trophy after defeating Andhra Pradesh by nine wickets in the final of the Men's National T20 Cricket Tournament for the Blind 2023-24 here, claiming a title at the national level after 20 years. Andhra Pradesh set a formidable target by posting 237/5 in 20 overs in the final, showcasing a commendable performance. However, Karnataka displayed remarkable resilience to reach 241/1, chasing down the target with just two balls to spare, concluding the tournament with a thrilling finish for visually impaired cricketers. Following 71 days of competition, featuring fiery batting and bowling performances, Karnataka claimed the coveted Nagesh Trophy. Sunil Ramesh was named as the Player of the Match.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Sebastian Korda gives US 1-0 lead over Ukraine

PARIS, 2 FEB

Sebastian Korda gave the United States a 1-0 lead against Ukraine in Davis Cup qualifying by hitting six of his 16 aces in the last two games along the way to beating Oleksii Krutykh 6-3, 6-7 (3), 6-4 on Thursday. Korda was down 2-1 in the third set before grabbing three consecutive games to move in front for good. The No. 33 Korda whose father, Petr, won the 1998 Australian Open and whose sisters, Nelly and Jessica, are professional golfers is the lowest-ranked member of the American team. Krutykh is No. 342. The second match of Day 1 was scheduled to be No. 32 Chris Eubanks against No. 498 Viacheslav Bielinskyi. Eubanks, who is from Atlanta and played college tennis at Georgia Tech, took the place of an injured Taylor Fritz, who was ruled out because of an injured right hip. —*AP*

India thrash Bhutan 10-0 in SAFF U-19

DHAKA, 2 FEB

A rampaging India hammered Bhutan 10-0 to begin their SAFF U-19 Women's Championship campaign on a rollicking note with Pooja scoring four goals here on Friday. Pooja struck in the 31st 58th 59th and 90+4 minutes while Sibani Devi (8th 19th and 36th) scored a first-half hat-trick.Striker Sulanjana Raul (53rd) Menaka Lourembam (61st) and Arina Devi (73rd) added three more goals to take India's tally to double figures.Goalkeepers Anika Devi and Arina made their junior international debuts on Friday. India will play their next match against Bangladesh on Sunday. —*PTI*

Strong Indian team is firm favourite against Pakistan

KARACHI, 2 FEB

The Indian tennis team, on a historic tour to Pakistan, will take on the hosts in the Davis Cup 2024 Group 1 play-off tie on 3 and 4 February at the Pakistan Sports Complex in Islamabad.The five matches of the India vs Pakistan Davis Cup tennis tie will be live-streamed in India. India entered the World Group 1 play-off after beating Morocco 4-1 in the World Group II play-off at the Vijayant Khand Mini Stadium in Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, last September.A victory against Pakistan will take India into World Group I to be played in September later this year.—*AP*

Jaiswal master-class steers India to 336/6 as other batters falter

Getting Rohit as my first wicket is incredible: Bashir

VISAKHAPATNAM, 2 FEB

India's Yashasvi Jaiswal being greeted by England's Jonny Bairstow after the end of play on the first day of the second cricket test match **PHOTO: PTI**

Young India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal struck a career-best unbeaten 179 on the opening day of the second Test against England here on Friday and the left-hander said his focus was on batting sessions while dispatching bad balls.

The 22-year-old's magnificent knock his second century in six Tests took India to 336 for 6 from 93 overs when the stumps were drawn.

I wanted to play it session by session. When they were bowling well I just wanted to get through that spell. However, I wanted to convert the loose balls and play till the end Jaiswal said after the day's play. Rahul (Dravid) sir and Rohit (Sharma) bhai kept giving me the confidence and told me to convert this into a big innings and stay till the end said the youngster who decorated his innings with 17 fours and five sixes off 257 balls. He made 171 on his Test debut against the West Indies last year.

Unlike the series opener in Hyderabad where Jaiswal made 80 here, he ensured that he converted his strong start into a big hundred. I would love to double this up and play till the end for the team. I want to recover well for tomorrow he said.

Asked about the nature of the pitch Jaiswal said Initially the wicket was damp and there was spin and bounce with a bit of seam.

The pitch played a bit differently as in the morning it was a bit damp and then it settled. With the older ball, there was some bounce. Jaiswal had R Ashwin (5) by his side at stumps.

The "slight hassle" caused by a visa delay for the India tour is very much a thing of the past for 20-year-old England debutant **Shoaib Bashir**, who is chuffed about Rohit Sharma being his first Test wicket.

Bashir, who is of Pakistan heritage, could not travel with the England squad to Hyderabad from Abu Dhabi for the series opener due to a visa delay. He joined the team in the middle of the Hyderabad Test before witnessing a special win.On Friday, the 6'4 tall off-spinner showed what he was capable of and why skipper Ben Stokes picked him in the squad after watching a video clip of his bowling on social media.Bashir, who played only six first-class games before getting his big break, was England's best spinner on the opening day and returned figures of two for 100 in 28 overs. He also bowled the most number of overs on the day."It's been a very special, special day.

Shoaib Bashir **PHOTO: AP**

For all that I've been through in the last two to three years, it made it even more special. To get Rohit Sharma out, my first wicket feels incredible.

"He's a quality player, one of the best in the world, and a great player of spin as well," said Bashir after close of play. Bashir had to fly back to England from Abu Dhabi to get his visa sorted before taking the flight to India.

India 336 for 6 (Jaiswal 179*, Bashir 2-100, Ahmed 2-61) vs England. —*PTI*

Was disheartening to see others succeed: Sarfaraz

"My strength is that I am not easily satisfied. I play 500-600 balls every day. If I don't play at least 200-300 balls in a match, I feel like I haven't done much. It's a habit now."If you want to play five-day cricket, you have to stay patient and practice every day. I play cricket all day and that's why I can stay on the pitch for a long time," Sarfaraz added.The mountain of runs that he scored in the domestic circuit might have opened the doors of Indian cricket to him, but for Sarfaraz Khan the learning never stops as he aspires to join the league of legends like Virat Kohli, Viv Richards and Javed Miandad. —*PTI*

Ashmita Chaliha kept India's challenge in Thailand Masters 2024 alive **PHOTO: X**

Thailand Masters 2024: Ashmita enters semi-final

BANGKOK, 2 FEB

Ashmita Chaliha kept India's challenge in Thailand Masters 2024 alive after she reached the semi-finals of the badminton tournament on Friday (February 2) at the Nimibutr Stadium in Bangkok, Thailand.

The 24-year-old India registered a 21-14, 18-21, 21-13 win over Indonesia's Ester Nurumi Tri Wardoyo in the women's singles quarterfinal match that lasted just under an hour, 57 minutes to be precise, on Court 2.

The youngster eased to take the first game 21-14, but the Indonesian fought back from going down, to force the decider, in which the Indian raced to an 11-4 lead before taking the game and the match. Chaliha, who has reached her first semi-final on the BWF World Tour, will next face either seventh seed Wen Chi Hsu of Chinese Taipei or fourth seed Supanida Katethong of Thailand in the last four matches on Saturday .

Earlier on Friday ,a men's singles contestant and a women's doubles team in contention for a semifinal spot failed to win their respective quarter-final matches and bowed out of the BWF Super 300 tournament. Mithun Manjunath, who was the lone Indian that reached the men's singles quarters, lost in straight games 19-21, 15-21 to Dutch Mark Caljouw in the men's singles last 8 match that lasted 43 minutes on Court 2. In women's doubles, Treesa Jolly-Gayatri Gopichand pair went down fighting to fourth seeds Febriana Dwipuji Kusuma and Amalia Cahaya Pratiwi of Indonesia in the last 8 matches by a scoreline of 12-21, 21-17, 21-23 in an hour and 7 minutes on court 1. Earlier on Thursday . Kidambi Srikanth, Sankar Subramanian, Malvika Bansod, and the doubles pair of Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa were among the Indian shuttlers to make a second-round exit in the Thailand Masters 2024.

—*AP*

Bartlett shines on debut as Australia pump WI by 8 wickets

MELBOURNE, 2 FEB

Xavier Bartlett has written himself into the history books, delivering the second-best figures for a debutant in Australian cricket history **PHOTO: X**

A stunning debut spell from Xavier Bartlett and a classy all-round display from Cameron Green guided Australia to a comfortable eight-wicket win in the opening ODI at the MCG. Bartlett tore through West Indies' top order on his ODI debut to finish with 4 for 17, the second-best figures on ODI debut for Australia behind current selector Tony Dodemaide, while Green claimed 2 for 40 and then made 77 not out in his first innings at No. 3 in ODI cricket to showcase his immense all-round talent. Josh Inglis also made a blistering 43-ball 65 while Steven Smith made an unassuming unbeaten run-a-ball 79 as Australia mowed down West Indies' under-par total of 231, which was underpinned by a career-best 88 from Keacy Carty and 59 from Roston Chase. It was Bartlett's spell that set up the win.The 25-year-old Queenslander and Lance Morris became the first debutants for Australia to open the bowling together in an ODI since 2016, and just the third pair since 1975. Bartlett claimed a wicket with his third ball in ODI cricket, clipping the top of Justin Greaves' off stump with a magical outswinger. with a maiden after his opening spell. He later returned to pick up his fourth wicket with the first ball of the 48th over but could not grab a fifth as Sean Abbott finished the innings in the 49th over. After Bartlett's burst, West Indies slumped to 59 for 4 when Green picked up the first of his two wickets. But Carty and Chase steadied the ship with an impressive century stand.

Australia 232 for 2 (Smith 79*, Green 77*, Inglis 65) beat West Indies 231 (Carty 88, Chase 59, Bartlett 4-17) by eight wickets. —*AP*

K'taka slip to 90 for 6 vs Railways

SURAT, 2 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

The stuttering Karnatakabatters squandered the advantage given by their bowlers, slipping to 90 for sixat the close of play on the first day of their Ranji Trophy Elite Group C matchagainst Railways here on Friday.

However, the Karnataka bowlers had a goodday in the park, bundling out Railways for 155. Pacer Vasuki Koushik (3/22) and17-year-old left-arm spinner Hardik Raj (3/28) derailed Railways.

During their reply, the Karnataka batters'focus was taken away a bit by the absence of their prolific captain MayankAgarwal after he was ruled out of this match.

Agarwal could not travel to Surat ashe felt a burning sensation in his mouth and throat after accidentally consuminga spurious liquid from a pouch during his flight out of Agartala a couple ofdays back.

He is recovering in Bengaluru. Without Agarwal's solid presence, Karnataka'stop-order caved in against left-arm spinner Akash Pandey, who took three for21.

Earlier, skipper Pratham Singh made a solid56 off 131 balls but he could not keep the consistent Karnataka bowlers at bayfor long.

Brief Scores: At Surat: Railways 155 allout in 56 Singh 56, Mohammad Saif 45; 400 Vasuki Koushik 3/22, Hardik Raj 3/28) vsKarnataka 90/6 in 27.5 overs (KV Aneesh 27; Akash Pandey 3/21). —*PTI*

India thrash Nepal by 132 runs in U-19 WC

BLOEMFONTEIN, 2 FEB

Contrasting hundreds by Sachin Dhas and skipper Uday Saharan were the twin pillars on which India built their commanding 132-run win over Nepal in their final Super Six Group 1 match, which also carried them to the semifinals of the ICC Under-19 World Cup semifinals here on Friday.

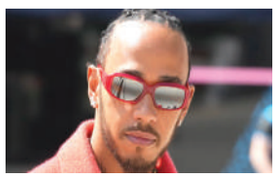
Dhas (116, 101 balls) and Saharan (100, 107 balls), who added 215 off 202 balls, lifted India from a tricky 62/3 to a formidable 297/5 after they opted to bat first.The tournament favorites, who now have eight points, then limited the Himalayan nation to 165 for nine, and in the semis, India is all set to face South Africa at Benoni on Tuesday.

However, Nepal made a rather strong start to their chase reaching 65 for 1 in the 14th over before they fell headlong, losing six wickets for a mere 12 runs to be placed at 77 for 7 in the 28th over.

Left-arm spinner Saumy Pandey, who now has 16 wickets to be placed at the second spot in the tournament's highest wicket-taker list, sparked the collapse with figures of 10-1-29-4.The only silver lining for Nepal was the unbroken last-wicket partnership of Aakash Chand (18 not out) and Durgesh Gupta (29 not out) who put together 45 runs to cover the stipulated 50 overs. Before Pandey entered the stage, new ball bowler Raj Limbani initiated the downfall by dismissing Deepak Bohara. —*AP*

Hamilton reveals reason behind shocking decision

DUBAI, 2 FEB



Hamilton **PHOTO: AP**

The news of seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton leaving Mercedes to join Ferrari in 2025 took the Formula 1 world by storm. While fans were ecstatic at the prospect of Hamilton teaming up with young sensation Charles Leclerc in Ferrari, a lot of them were left wondering about the reason behind his sudden departure from Mercedes - a team that he joined back in 2013. According to a report by Racing News 365, Hamilton's decision may have been impacted by another big departure.

The report claimed that Hamilton decided on the Head of Vehicle Performance at Mercedes Loic Serra also decided to join Ferrari for the 2025 campaign. Mercedes has struggled to keep up with Red Bull in the recent past and Hamilton last won a F1 race way back in December 2021.In the past season, Hamilton expressed his concerns regarding the new car designed by Mercedes and the report further claimed that Serra had similar issues as Hamilton. With the duo joining Ferrari together in 2025, the goal will be to work towards mounting a big challenge to reigning champion Max Verstappen. —*AP*

Man Utd beats Wolves 4-3

LONDON, 2 FEB

Manchester United rescued a late 4-3 victory over Wolves thanks to a dramatic winner from Kobbie Mainoo in injury time.

The visitors twice had a two-goal lead, but Wolves pulled it back to 3-3 in the dying minutes with goals from Max Kilman and then an injury-time strike from Pedro Neto.

Neto's 95th-minute strike looked to have secured a point for the home side, only for United to go straight up the other end and sneak back the win with a brilliant individual goal from the 18-year-old Mainoo.

United dominated the first half, creating a stream of chances and having two goals disallowed. Much of the pre-match build-up radiated around Marcus Rashford, who responded to being dropped from the squad last weekend by putting United ahead inside five minutes with a fine curling effort. —*AP*

PHILLIPS DEBUT BLUNDER

West Ham fights back to draw with Bournemouth

QATAR, 2 FEB

West Ham United debutant Kalvin Phillips gifted Bournemouth an early goal before the Hammers fought back to earn a 1-1 Premier League draw at the London Stadium on Thursday.

England midfielder Phillips, on loan from Manchester City, underwent an attempted backpass inside three minutes to give Dominic Solanke a tap-in for his 13th goal of the campaign.

West Ham manager David Moyes said Phillips was fine after the match and attributed the error to a lack of game time.

"As the game went on tonight, he was starting to get a bit better, starting to find his feet a little bit more, I thought he was just slow at the start of the game," Moyes told reporters.

West Ham could have been two down but for a strong hand by Alphonse Areola to deny Antoine Semenyo before Tomas Soucek spurned a good chance and headed over just before the break.

The hosts improved in the second half and equalized after 61 minutes through a James Ward-Prowse penalty, eventually awarded by VAR for Lloyd Kelly's foul on Mohammed Kudus.

Phillips was replaced by striker Danny Ings as West Ham pushed for a win and created half-chances, though Bournemouth constantly carried a threat on the break.

The sides had to settle for a point each, however, and Bournemouth manager Adoni Iraola was happy enough.

"There's a part where you have to value the point because we know it's not easy to come to this stadium and get a result, but I indeed think if any of the teams deserved to win today it was Bournemouth," he said.

West Ham United in action against Bournemouth **PHOTO: AP**

Moyes also declared himself content with the result.

"I'm happy with a point,

- West Ham United debutant Kalvin Phillips gifted Bournemouth an early goal before the Hammers fought back to earn a 1-1 Premier League draw at the London Stadium on Thursday.

I'm not happy with the performance generally," he said.

West Ham remained sixth in the table on 36 points and Bournemouth moved up to 12th place on 26.—*AP*